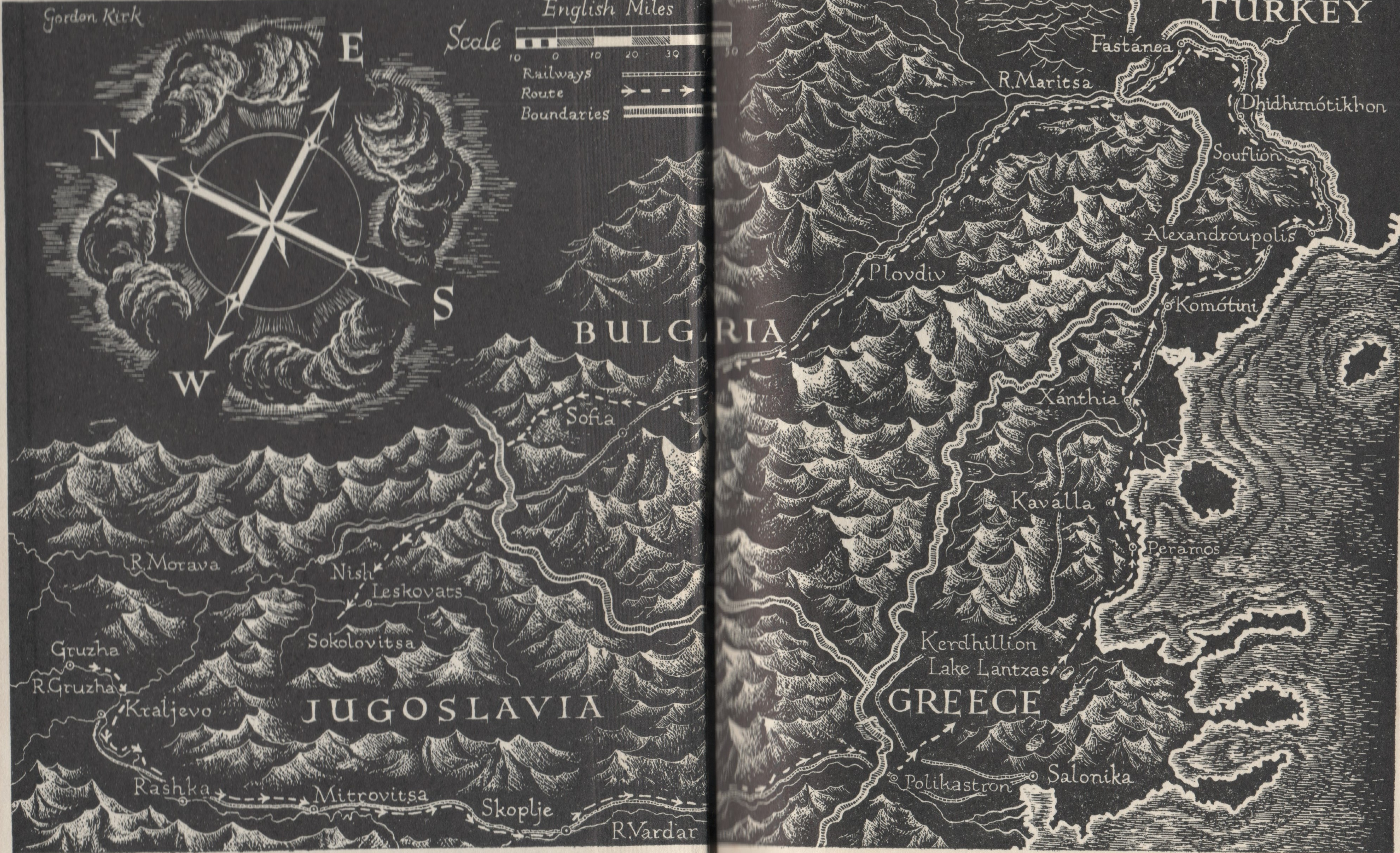
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Kerdhillion
Lake Lantzas
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Mitrovitsa
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Polikastron
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# IRREGULAR ADVENTURE

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*DEDICATION*

*I have dedicated this book to all those who, in this war, were in suspense about someone whom they loved, and who, through years of waiting, never lost faith*

# IRREGULAR ADVENTURE

by

Christie Lawrence

with an introduction by
EVELYN WAUGH

FABER & FABER LIMITED
24 Russell Square
London

# FOREWORD

There are three things about *Irregular Adventure* which I should like to explain.

I escaped from the Germans in 1941, and I spent most of the following twelve months in Jugoslavia. *Irregular Adventure* is about what I did there. Nearly four years passed before I started to write it, but I have tried hard not to be influenced either by things that are now generally known or by things that I have been told by people who were there.

Most of the conversation is put down in direct speech because this helped me to record my impressions truthfully.

Lastly, I have altered the names of certain of my Jugoslav friends, so that they should not be harmed by anything that I have written.

C. L.

*Queen Camel, Somerset*
*August 1946*

# INTRODUCTION

### BY EVELYN WAUGH

This is the record of the adventures of a young English officer from his capture in Crete in 1941 until his arrival in Belgrade almost exactly one year later. It is unique and romantic; and it is the plain truth.

I had the honour to serve, all too briefly, with its author, in No. 8 Commando. That force, the first command of the officer who was later to become Chief of Combined Operations, deserves a place in literature, if not in military history. Through the misfortunes of war it never went into action as a single unit, but was dispersed in small groups, many of which performed some of the most surprising feats of war. Officers and men had volunteered because they sought service more adventurous than was offered at the time by normal regimental life; all were highly individualistic; none more so than Christie Lawrence, who as a junior subaltern was noticeable among his blander fellows for an appearance that was both bellicose and intellectual; of a type which was often recognizable later among the resistance movements of Europe. I last saw him in Crete at the end of May 1941, when communications and supplies had broken down and the island was being evacuated as quickly as possible. Hunger and exhaustion had by then produced a dream-night condition when people seemed to appear and disappear inconsequently and leave unconnected fragments of memory behind them. One of these fragments is my meeting Lawrence in a cave near Sphakia. He or I or both of us were slightly delirious. I remember his telling me a rambling story of his having run into a rock on a motor-bicycle. Then carrying two rifles he wandered off again, alone, in the direction of the enemy.

The book recalls in detail what befell him after the capitulation. It is typical of the spirit of No. 8 Commando that his first instinct after his first night's rest should be to escape from being 'one of the herd,' and that, unsuccessful in his main object, he should be rewarded by driving to prison full of red wine and roast chicken. Later, as will appear, he escaped successfully; he alternately starved and feasted; he commanded a platoon of chetniks, he indulged in a highly irregular politico-military intrigue, took the most startling risks in a land where all was anarchy save where the enemy had imposed their brutal law.

The story should bring encouragement to all who may be in danger of doubting whether knight-errantry is still possible in the conditions of modern war. No-one could ask for a better thriller.

But the book has another importance. It will be of real value to the historian. Very little is known of the events in Jugoslavia which were unhappily described as her 'finding her soul.' Much that has been written has been deliberately false. It is gradually appearing now that whatever did happen there was of unsuspected importance in world history. At the time the country was treated by the Allied Command as a place of trivial interest for which a few aeroplanes and weapons were occasionally grudgingly spared; one whose people had no legitimate aims of their own but could be called upon to make the most appalling sacrifices in order to inconvenience the Germans. We now realize too late that the country is a vital fortress in political strategy.

Jugoslavia was the creation of the Liberal peacemakers of the first World War, who light-heartedly placed the old Hapsburg dominions under the Karageorge dynasty. From the first years of the peace disruptive forces were apparent. Croats and Slovenes almost unanimously sought independence of the Serbs. Moreover outside the country three neighbours at least—Italy, Russia, and Hungary—were training agents to exploit these disruptive forces at the first opportunity. This opportunity was provided by the English and French declaration of war on Germany. At the first pressure the country fell to pieces. Croats and Slovenes received their independence, at first gladly, then with growing

resentment when they discovered that its price was the cession of territory to Italy and an Italian king. Serbia dissolved into bands whose leaders made their own policy in every degree of loyalty from stubborn resistance to open collaboration with the enemy. Lawrence's account gives the first authentic picture of this kaleidoscopic scene of villainy and heroism. It was in the long run a poor service to Mihailovitch to proclaim him Minister of War, for it gave him responsibility for subordinates whom he could never fully control and with whom he could seldom communicate; and in the bitter end this responsibility made easy the task of the prosecution at his trial. The German system of reprisals stayed the offensive action of the chetniks. They considered the price wholly out of proportion to the gain. The communists were more ruthless. It was therefore easy for interested agents to represent them as the sole core of resistance. Communists, chetniks, royalists, Croat peasants, all knew well that the Jugoslavs could not themselves defeat Germany or even seriously injure her. When liberation came it would come by invasion from outside. The black decision to abandon the Allied landings and to leave the decisive invasion to the Russians and Bulgarians meant the surrender of all who looked west for salvation to Communist domination and punishment.

Meanwhile the mock trials and the special pleading continue. It is invigorating to read this simple account of the observations of a single, unbiased, enterprising observer. Accounts such as this, pieced together, may one day serve to produce a true history of the Jugoslav disaster.

The end of this book raises the hope that there will be a sequel. Without self-assertion or introspection Lawrence has made himself into a literary character whose career cannot be left in suspense. I believe that I am only an early member of a great host of readers who will eagerly devour this book and impatiently await its successor.

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Country through which Lawrence travelled immediately after his escape (Chapters I–IV) *endpapers*

Country in which Lawrence worked with the guerrillas (Chapters V–XI) *at the end of the book*

# NOTE

Because it is difficult to memorize a lot of Jugoslav names, a list of the most important people in the book has been prepared in alphabetical order, so that if the reader, in the course of the narrative, wishes to refer to it, he may do so with greater ease. This list will be found on page 268.

The Jugoslav letter *j*, which has been retained throughout, is sometimes represented in English by the letter *y* and is, in fact, almost a pure *y* sound.

Other Jugoslav letters, some of which do not exist in the English alphabet, have been approximately anglicized. Thus, the Jugoslav letter *c* is represented as *ts*; *č* as *ch*; *ć* as *tch*; *š* as *sh*; *ž* as *zh*; and the combination *lij* as *lj* where the latter, to an English ear, more closely represents the sound.

The endpaper map illustrates the country in which the action of the first four chapters of the book took place; for the last seven chapters it is suggested that the reader should refer to the larger-scale map at the end.

# I

We were very tired of Crete. We were tired of fighting a losing battle which every man knew we might have won. We were tired of scavenging for food and ammunition because the services had broken down; tired of abandoning positions because bridges which should have been blown were left untouched; and tired, above all, of our continual retreat.

For three nights, ships of the Navy had stood off Sphakia, a place on the southern coast of the island where the mountains run steeply down to the sea, and they had taken on board Anzacs who had fought their way from the northern frontiers of Greece over killing miles of Balkan hills; British infantry bomb-happy and demoralized; stragglers from the Royal and Merchant Navy vessels sunk in Suda Bay; sappers and gunners, bewildered and disorganized from lack of orders: everybody tired, dirty, and many ill with hunger.

Stukas there were and had been. Their drone and whine gave you a sick feeling in the stomach, and loosened the joints of the knees.

The fourth night was the 31st of May 1941. There remained 8,000 troops, gathered into a small circle around Sphakia beachhead, and protected by the remains of one Anzac brigade, a brigade of Marines, and two Commandos. None of these units by now had much in the way of ammunition, but all were nevertheless striving desperately to keep the beach out of range of the deadly fire of the German mortars.

At this point it was decided that ships were more valuable than men, that these remnants of an army could no longer be either rescued or supplied, and that the island must be capitulated to the enemy.

The morning of June the 1st dawned very clear. I awakened in my cave near Force H.Q., refreshed after the first undisturbed sleep for several days. I looked forward almost eagerly to what I thought was the final battle with the advancing enemy. After that, I hoped, there would still be room for me in one of the destroyers.

Outside Force H.Q., I found, unaccountably, a pile of broken rifles. A little knot of disgruntled and dirty New Zealanders were sitting on a rock finishing the General's tinned chicken. Apart from them, the H.Q. appeared deserted. They told me about the capitulation order, and I did not believe them. They showed me the broken rifles, and pointed out that there was no firing going on. Patiently they explained that there was now nobody between us and the enemy.

'Your Commandos', they said, 'were withdrawn at about ten o'clock last night. They must have forgotten to tell you about it. . . . But it makes no difference, you've all missed the boat.' The New Zealanders were gloomy about it, for so had they.

I collected the half-dozen signallers who had been with me in the cave, and we all walked slowly back to the beach. It was not a beach as one is apt to imagine it, but a small rocky bay with a deep anchorage, off which the ships had lain. The little grey village, with its steep, narrow streets, was deserted and mostly in ruins. The waterfront was foul with oil and empty tins. A few broken fishing-boats were pulled up from the tide.

Men, unshaven, and in dirty and torn uniforms, were sitting in groups trying to get used to the idea of being taken prisoner. Their apathy equalled mine. The tension had gone from the air. Colonel Young of the Middle East Commando had already set off for the German lines to surrender the remains of the force. After he had gone, Stukas bombed the beach and killed several men. The rest were neither more nor less frightened than they had been before, but now they were angry too.

I stood and watched Major Garrett of the Marines with a small party of men set out for Egypt in an abandoned M.L.C. I was not tempted to go with him, for I thought that even captivity was better than the certain death to which he must be going. Two or three other Commando officers agreed with me, for we knew the capabilities and limitations of M.L.C.'s. Years later, as we sat in prisoner-of-war camps, we would have taken far greater risks with far less chance of success; and Major Garrett's enterprise and courage were rewarded, for he made the northern coast of Africa with all but one or two of his men.

Apart from the Stukas, the Germans showed no signs of activity. They seldom moved very early in the day. It was difficult to realize quite what was happening. The battle was over and nothing had yet taken its place. There seemed to be plenty of opportunity to escape and take to the hills, but very few people made any move. Perhaps most of them thought as I did that it would not be much good escaping when you were on an island with four or five hundred miles of sea separating you from the nearest friendly shore, and had nothing to use as a boat.

I walked along the little rocky beach and looked at the mirror of the sea. Never have I seen a sea so calm. Major Garrett's M.L.C. was already a speck far out, and, as I watched, I saw four Stukas circling over it. In turn they dived on it, and I heard the rat-tat-tat-tat of machine-gun fire from the seemingly immense distance.

'Poor fellows!' I thought, 'that's the end of them.'

I took out my Colt automatic, which I had never fired at a man. It was a beautiful weapon, and shone wickedly in the strengthening morning sun. I stripped it down, and threw the pieces one by one as far into the sea as I could, and the fifty rounds from my pouch after them. The brass rounds sparkled in the sun, and fell with little splashes, like raindrops. I broke the lenses of my binoculars, and threw them in too.

Dejectedly, I strolled along the beach until I came to the end of the tiny bay. Here a narrow cleft led through the solid black rock of the cliff, and I followed it without curiosity.

I found myself in a tiny cove, almost entirely closed in from the sea. The water was crystal clear and very deep.

Through four fathoms I looked down on red and gold seaweeds, still with the stillness of the June morning. Among them were little silver fish, that swam nonchalantly, as though they had nothing much to do.

The water looked inviting, and when I felt it with my hand I found that it was warmer than it looked. I stripped off my clothes, which I had worn continuously for a week—that was a hardship in those days—and dived in. There in the middle of the cove, with no sound except the splashes of my arms as I swam lazily, I felt happier.

Slowly I swam across to the far side, and hung on to a rocky ledge which stuck out a foot above my head. After a little while, I thought I would like to climb on to it and dive off again into the water. I pulled myself up.

There, in front of me, a foot from my eyes, lay the corpse of a British soldier. His wide eyes stared unseeing into mine. His face was black with the decomposition which the hot sun had already started, and from the corner of his mouth there was a stain of purple blood which had run down and dripped on to the rock.

For a few horrible seconds we looked each other in the face, and then I dropped back into the water and swam back in a dream to the other side where I had left my clothes. It seemed that the war was still going on.

After five years, the memory of that morning, the 1st of June 1941, is very hazy. There was an animal feeling of hunger, and a drowsy, apathetic feeling, born, perhaps, of reaction. I remember most clearly the German, a young man, red-headed, who came into a house where I was eating a few scraps of biscuit which I had scrounged. He stood in the doorway and pushed forward his tommy-gun.

"Raus, 'raus,' he shouted.

He looked frightened, as well he might, for there were ten people in the room, some of them armed, and he was alone.

There is nothing to being taken prisoner after a capitulation. Thousands of you surrender to a few hundreds of the enemy. They herd you into groups, with the officers separate from the men, and run their hands over you for weapons. Compasses, and small objects which you think might be useful, are usually quite easily hidden for the first few days. I carried mine in my sock.

It is degrading, nevertheless, being taken prisoner when you are unwounded. It upsets your self-esteem. You are badgered and bullied by the soldiers of another race, and you have to go where they tell you and do what they say. And all the time there is the nagging feeling that you ought not to submit, even temporarily. But you are in a mass, a herd of people with a herd instinct. A new authority has been imposed on you from which you are not yet ready to rebel. You distrust your own leaders, because you feel, unjustly, that they have led you into this, and they distrust themselves, because they feel that even if they gave you a lead you would not follow it. And they are right. It is so painfully obvious that you are well and truly beaten, that you have no weapons, and that any attempt on a large scale to defy the enemy would certainly result in heavy loss of life and accomplish nothing, that nobody makes any move at all. You feel safer in the frying-pan than you might be in the fire.

When the Germans had rounded us up and counted us, they started to march us back along the route over which we had retreated from the northern side of the island. We were already very tired and hungry, and we went on marching all that day without getting either food or rest.

After a battle the countryside stinks. You pass, as you march back, the bodies of the comrades you have left lying by the road. Nobody has had time to bury them. Thus we came to a group of half a dozen men who had been killed by a bomb in an olive grove. At first we thought that they were Maoris, but later we saw that that was only because their faces had gone black because they had been dead several days. They had evidently sat down to have a meal when the bomb dropped, and had been killed by the blast; and there they still sat, with their plates in their hands and their backs against the trees, on the edge of the white, dusty road. They stank.

To review the field of a battle you have lost is a horrid thing to do. Every gully might have been held, you think, and every little action won, if only, here, you had been warned, or, there, you had not run out of ammunition. No soldier ever loses a battle through any fault of his own. Always it is someone else who lets him down.

The first night, still without food, we slept in a field, surrounded by the guards, and the next morning they started us off marching again. At about two o'clock in the afternoon, they gave us a tin of English bully beef and a packet of biscuits, between seven. We were allowed a halt to eat it in an open space on the hillside.

During this rest I decided that I would no longer consent to be one of the herd. I got up and openly walked towards some low bushes at the edge of the space where we were. The nearest guard shouted something at me, and I turned and waved a piece of paper at him, taking off my belt and making motions of letting down my trousers. He shouted something incomprehensible, and pointed towards the bushes.

When I reached them, he was still looking, and so I took down my trousers and squatted behind the nearest, watching him through it. As soon as something else attracted his attention from me, I moved a little farther away, and thus, gradually, I worked my way to a low brick wall, which ran obliquely up the hillside. When I came to within a yard of it, still without standing, I did up my trousers and, waiting until I thought that nobody was looking, I straightened up and scrambled over.

On the other side I crawled as rapidly as I could for about a hundred yards, where the wall ended. There I lay down in a ditch to await developments. Presently, I heard the guards shouting, and saw the prisoners lining up in columns to resume the march. Nobody noticed me. After about half an hour they moved off. When they had gone I ran to the top of the hill and passed out of sight from the road. Then I sat down to think.

I was hungry and exhausted. I knew that I was somewhere on the south-west corner of the island, but exactly

where, I had no means of telling. The first thing was to get some food and sleep. After that, I thought, I would make my way to the coast, where I would try to find a boat.

In the first house I came to there lived a peasant who was of very forbidding aspect, and who, when I asked him for food as best I could in sign-language, only shook his head. I noticed, however, that he had some tomato plants on which the fruit was ripe, and so I did not go far away, but waited for him to go indoors. Then I crept back and filled my pockets with tomatoes. From there I wandered across the hill in a southerly direction, eating the tomatoes as I went.

It was rocky and barren country. For about two hours I met nobody, and though there were a few houses in the valleys on either side I did not like to approach them. Then I saw a house half-way down the hillside which seemed deserted. I went in through the open door, and looked around to see whether I could find anything to eat. Someone had been there before me, and all the cupboards had been ransacked. Outside, a few scraggy hens were scratching about in the yard.

I went out, and tried creeping up on one from behind, but it received a warning in time from one of its companions, and ran away, squawking wildly. I abandoned stealth and tried force. But the hens were very athletic, and it was only after a full half-hour of chasing them that I finally cornered one and caught it. With great satisfaction, I twisted its neck, and held on until its death struggles had subsided. Then I turned to go, and found my way blocked by two enormous Germans with revolvers. They were very amused.

One of them, in polite but schoolboy French, told me that I must consider myself their prisoner. I asked if I could keep the hen, and he said that I could, for they had come for the same thing themselves.

While one covered me with his revolver, the other quickly shot two more hens, and then they took me off to where they had a British fifteen-hundredweight truck on a track the other side of the house.

I told them that I was very tired, and they agreed to let me spend the night in their billets, provided that I would promise not to try to escape during the night. Next morning, they said, they would take me on in their truck to Kanea, which was the destination of the rest of the prisoners. Although I remembered having read that a prisoner of war was not allowed to give his parole, I promised, for this seemed much better than marching all the way with the column.

When we got back to their billets, which were in a village on the road from Spahkia to Suda Bay, the Germans gave the chickens to a peasant's wife to clean and cook. I lay down on the floor and fell fast asleep.

About midnight the Germans woke me up and told me that the chickens were cooked. They had several bottles of looted Greek wine, and some very fiery brandy. We all drank copiously, and they told me that they thought that we had lost the war. I half believed them, but did not say so. They asked me how I thought that the British could possibly win it, and I could not think of a satisfactory answer. With as much dignity as I could muster, I told them that I could not discuss military matters. They laughed.

Towards the end of the meal, which I had eaten sitting on the floor, I fell asleep again, and slept until late in the morning. One of the Germans had gone, and the other was cleaning his rifle, with his revolver by his side. He said that they were not going back to Kanea until that afternoon.

At lunch-time we had some more chicken and brandy, and then the German who spoke French filled my water-bottle with wine, and we climbed into the truck and set off for Kanea. We drove very slowly.

'This is a very good truck,' I said.

'Let's not talk politics,' said the German who talked French.

'What is the food situation on the island like?' I asked.

'There is no food at all, except that which we captured from the English,' replied the German.

'Then how do you intend to feed the prisoners of war?' I asked.

'You will be sent away to Germany very soon,' he said.

After a little while he added: 'You know, if you had not started to retreat, we should have given up in twenty-four hours.'

'But we had no ammunition,' I said.

'Neither had we,' said the German. 'And we lost the best part of a parachute and glider division. Your navy interrupted our supplies.'

It was very mortifying to hear him.

We soon arrived at Kanea, which we found in ruins. Near by there was a huge P.O.W. pen erected by British prisoners taken early in the battle.

'We will take you on to Maleme,' said the German. 'It is better there. There is a camp there for officers only.'

We arrived at Maleme at the same time as the main column. They were all worn out and desperately hungry. There was no camp, only an orange grove with an ordinary barbed-wire fence. Parachutes were lying about on the ground and caught up in the trees, and we made bivouacs of them.

At Maleme, because there was no food, and the Germans had little or none to give us, parties used to go out at night and even in the daylight, to look for it. A few men escaped into the hills, but most of them came back, because, they said, the villages were deserted and there was nothing to eat. The feeling of apathy grew, and we lay under the trees and deteriorated mentally and physically, though few of us perceived it. We did not know that we were committing the first cardinal error of prisoners of war. Never again did we have such an ideal opportunity of escaping.

The days were cloudless, and we lived on food and plain red wine scrounged from the deserted houses around our encampment. The guards did not interfere with us, but many of us began to think that we were badly off, and to look forward to what we thought would be the comfort of an established camp. There, we thought, we should be allowed to write home, and to receive books and parcels of food from England.

In restless moments I began to form a vague plan of escape. I thought that I would try to break away from the column as we passed through Greece on our way to Germany. I would make for Turkey, either by bribing a fisherman to take me in a boat, or by crossing the frontier on foot.

On the 11th of June we were flown from Maleme aerodrome in cumbersome German transport planes. Maleme was the smallest of the three aerodromes in Crete, and consisted of just a flat space running down to the sea, without runways. As we took off we were able to see the full toll we had taken of their first waves in the battle. On and around the landing ground we counted the wrecks of more than eighty transports, most of them beyond repair.

Looking at them I was able to see how long ago operations like this had been planned. Long before the war I had seen these very planes come in and land daily at Croydon. Even the corrugated effect of the fuselage was unchanged.

Flying over the Ionian Sea at a few thousand feet, it was difficult to believe that one was a prisoner of war. The sea was ultramarine, and the little islands, so many of them, were like little spots of green paint splashed with a careless brush.

Landed at Athens, we felt very shabby beside the Luftwaffe officers in their musical-comedy uniforms, strutting about showing their musical-comedy manners, saluting, bowing, and shaking each other by the hand.

We were driven through Athens in civilian trucks commandeered from the Greeks. Athens, lying spread-eagled below the dignity of the Acropolis, seemed almost untouched by the war. But there were very few people in the streets.

In the yard of the railway station we were ordered out of the lorries, and herded into a long, low shed, where we were told we should have a long time to wait. There, a tall, thin officer with an eyeglass took charge of us. He made us a long speech, which was relayed by an interpreter. He said that he knew exactly how to treat British prisoners of war. He himself had been a prisoner of the British in the last war, and they had left him for two days, wounded, without food or water. He said that anyone who tried to escape would be instantly shot, and that anyone who succeeded would be shot when he was recaptured.

We did not feel the full force of his influence until the journey started. Pushed into crowded third-class carriages—Greek National Railway carriages, which had never been very clean, and were now filthy—we were given very little food and less water. At first, whenever the train stopped, Greek civilians surrounded the carriages and tried to pass us things to eat and drink. But the guards fired off their rifles at them. They wounded one British officer in the head and another in the hand.

At one station there was an old woman with a basket full of loaves. One of the guards descended and beat her on the chest with the butt of his rifle. She dropped the basket, and the guard picked up the loaves and made off with them.

Several bridges were down, and we had to make detours on foot. Although there was ample opportunity to escape, nobody did. Those of us who had so intended made excuses for ourselves. We made up our minds that it was no good escaping when one felt so tired. We said that we were waiting for the train to take us nearer to the Turkish frontier. We agreed that the fifth night of the journey would be the best, for by then we should almost have reached Salonika.

But on the evening of the fifth day we arrived at Salonika, and our chances had been missed.

Salonika camp ought to have given us a foretaste of what being prisoners of war was to mean to us. It did not, because we believed that it was impossible that the Germans could treat prisoners of war like that in Germany itself. Our foolish optimism led us still to look forward to a time when we should be able to write home and receive parcels and other comforts.

The camp had been a Greek barracks, and the buildings were lousy and alive with bed-bugs. It was surrounded with barbed-wire entanglements, erected by the prisoners taken before us in Greece. The quarters were of brick, but were dirty and dilapidated.

There were about two thousand British troops in the camp, and a thousand odds and ends of Lascar seamen, Maltese internees, and stragglers from the Jugoslav Army. The officers were put into a building apart, a separate compound fenced off from the rest of the camp, so that we should not mingle with the men. The men lived in long brick-built barracks, along either side of a dirt parade-ground, which was about a hundred yards square.

Though there were trees in the camp, it was a dismal and depressing place. Everything was covered with dust from the parade-ground, and the drab brown paint was peeling from doors and window-frames; even the leaves of the trees, which were stunted limes, looked as if they needed a wash.

The inmates were in equally poor condition. Most of us were unshaven most of the time, for we had lost our kit and had no razors. Our clothes were torn and dirty, and we had nothing with which to clean our boots. There was a general air of fatigue and boredom. Men lounged in doorways or lay in the shade in disconsolate groups.

Each day we were given a kilogram of bread between on the average fifteen men, and a bowl of soup at midday. Occasionally the soup contained a lump of horsemeat. Apart from this, a certain amount of food was brought into the camp by the men who went out working on working-parties. Jews, from the Palestine labour battalion, set up a black market, on which they would sell a loaf of bread for three pounds, or a little piece of sausage an inch or two long for ten shillings. This was a good thing for those who had been able to conceal about their persons a few hundred pounds of company or battalion funds. The rest of us drew in our belts and were envious.

Generally the morale of the camp was extremely bad. There were numerous spies and quislings among us. The most powerful Britisher was a sergeant-major, who had been appointed by the Germans a sort of official interpreter and general yes-man. He did very well out of it, too, for he had the most comfortable quarters in the camp, and was never short of food or cigarettes. He had no hesitation in reporting anybody who disobeyed his orders—even when they were illegal—to the Germans for punishment. He was also directly responsible for the death or imprisonment of many who planned escapes. There was little or no comradeship, except among small groups of friends. Every man's hand was against his neighbour.

We had not yet learned how to deal with the Germans. The habit of obedience was still with us, and often we obeyed without question orders that were patently illegal. We hoped that, if we obeyed them, we should be better treated.

It was our first experience of being hungry, and we did not stand up to it well. Being hungry means having a slight stomach ache all the time, and having one's mouth continually watering; waking up in the night and being unable to go to sleep again because one's mind dwells on juicy steaks and cooking smells. Hitler's experts knew very well that nothing reduces men's morale and makes them easy to manage so quickly as keeping them hungry. It is a shock to see a man, whom one has known and respected as a brother officer, creeping along the barrackroom in the darkness to try and steal a crust which someone else has saved for breakfast. It is a shock also to see Englishmen, educated at the world's most famous universities, scavenging for potato peelings. But the greatest shock is when you find yourself scavenging with them.

It was chiefly as an antidote to these things, and to take our minds off them, that three other Commando officers and I started seriously to plan our escape.

We conferred every day, and planned continually how to overcome the difficulty of making the initial break. In this we had no help from the senior officers. When we approached the lieutenant-colonel who was temporarily in charge of us, and put to him a plan for substituting ourselves for men and going out on a working-party in the town, he refused to countenance the idea of keeping two soldiers in the officers' enclosure for a short while, in order to put the Germans off the scent.

'For', he said, 'it would prejudice the chances that those who must remain behind have of persuading the Germans to improve living conditions.'

We therefore had to work behind the backs even of our own people.

We found at last two places where we judged that the wire entanglement surrounding the camp might, with some difficulty, be crossed. We obtained suits of civilian clothes, which we bought from the Maltese internees. From the Jews we bought a small store of food, and this seriously depleted the small sum of money which we had between us.

My partner was a young cavalry officer called Sandy. The other two were a huge South African known as Bill, and a tall young man in the 60th Rifles called Ken. The route which Sandy had found led straight from the officers' enclosure over two sets of wire. It necessitated climbing a high fence within fifty yards of where a sentry habitually stood. We should therefore need a moonless night. Ken and Bill's route was on the other side of the camp. They would have to cross the camp, carrying their kit, after the Germans had counted us in the evening, which they did at six o'clock. There was a disused bakery close to the spot which they had chosen, and there they planned to hide until a hour or two after dark. Then they would make their attempt.

While Sandy and I were waiting for our moonless night, Ken and Bill became restless, and eventually they decided to go without us.

On the night of their attempt, Sandy and I sat near the door of our barrack, smoking. Around us, our brother officers rolled themselves into their blankets and prepared for sleep. We alone knew that they were to make the attempt.

That night the stars and moon were very bright. There was a slight wind, which made a soughing noise in the trees, and we noticed with satisfaction that the moon threw deep shadows.

We were both excited, and as the minutes dragged we thought of the other two hiding in their bakehouse. We

wondered if they were more or less nervous than we were.

Sandy looked at his watch. It was half-past ten. There was half an hour before the time Ken and Bill had arranged.

Another ten minutes passed.

'Have a cigarette?' offered Sandy.

As he spoke, a burst of machine-gun fire, loud in the darkness as a pom-pom, rattled from the far end of the camp. There were shouts, and the sound of running feet. Two sentries dashed across the camp to the officers' enclosure, and examined the place which Sandy and I had chosen for our escape. The firing went on, and there were shouts in German and screams.

I sensed, rather than saw, the whiteness of Sandy's face.

We scrambled into our blankets.

'They've bogged it,' said Sandy.

'But what's all the commotion?' I asked. 'The firing is still going on.'

'God knows,' said Sandy. 'Perhaps they have cut and run for it.'

'Ken and Bill?'

'Who else?'

We lay there miserably until morning. At first light we got up and went out into the compound. There, in the middle of it, a body was sprawled. We thought for certain that it was either Ken or Bill. Germans were still moving about the camp.

We went back to our barrackroom and sat down on the dirty floor. Neither of us felt much like talking.

It was not until nearly an hour later, when most people had got up (there is not much fun in lying in bed when you are hungry and the floor is hard), that Sandy came up to me excitedly.

'They're back,' he said.

'Who?'

'Ken and Bill.'

'Whose is the body, then?' I asked.

Sandy then told me the first German horror story for the truth of which we could personally vouch.

Ken and Bill had reached the bakehouse, which was about five yards from the wire, shortly after the evening count. They had hidden in an oven, which was quite big enough for the two of them, with room for several more. There they sat waiting for the time they had decided on, which was eleven o'clock. They dared not smoke, and the minutes dragged by. At half-past ten they decided that it was already dark enough, and Bill pushed open the oven door. They were about to clamber out when they noticed a figure standing by the wire at the exact spot which they had chosen. He was not looking at them. He waited a minute, and then turned and beckoned to someone farther along the wire, which at that place was on the camp side of a high wall.

Two more men came creeping along and joined him, and then the first one started to cross the wire. He succeeded very well, making hardly any noise, and hoisted himself up on to the wall the other side. Then the others started to cross. For a moment the man on the wall was silhouetted against the sky, and one of the men in the wire slipped and made a slight noise.

As though this might have been a signal, the sentry on the other side of the wall, without challenging, opened fire with a tommy-gun on the man on the wall, who screamed and fell back into the wire. The two who were already crossing turned back. They were too late. The guard had turned out and came up at the double, shouting and firing as they came. There must have been several more in the attempt, said Sandy, for Bill saw them break away from dark corners and run back into the camp. The noise of firing sounded like a battle.

It suddenly dawned on Ken and Bill that they were in a very dangerous position. Should the Germans find them they were more than likely to shoot on sight. They closed the oven door and waited.

Presently someone rushed into the bakehouse and crouched against a wall. Ken and Bill, from their oven, could hear him panting.

Half a minute later there was the tramp of heavy field boots. The door opened again. The man on the floor began to whimper. There were three shots, and a groan. Then the door closed with a bang.

Ken and Bill stayed in their oven in fear for their lives. But the Germans did not find them. As soon as it began to get light, and they heard that everything seemed quieter, they slipped out, meaning to make their way back to the officers' enclosure. By chance, nobody saw them cross the camp. They found three Arab soldiers from the Palestine labour battalion dead in the wire, and one in the bakehouse. Another was sprawled in the middle of the parade-ground.

It was evident that the Germans must have known of this attempt before it was made, from the speed and organization with which the sentries worked, and the ruthlessness with which they hunted down the men who ran back into the camp. They shot them all, and most of them died. They left the bodies lying about the camp for two days as a deterrent.

For two or three nights after that the sentries round the camp were so conscious of their triggers that they had several battles with each other.

It took Sandy and me several days to recover our spirits. But when we did, we started to look for another weak spot in the camp's defences. We found one close beside some disused huts, not far from the officers' enclosure. Just outside the wire at that spot was a dry gully, several feet deep, which might hide us after we had crossed. It remained only to find out whether or not there was a sentry posted anywhere near. We decided that I should spend a night at the window of one of the huts, spying on the gully, and watching the movements of any sentries or patrols who might pass there.

One hot and still evening I crept across the dusty parade-ground shortly before dark, and took up my position at a window of one of the huts. The window faced west, and the sky before me was bright gold, and the sun dripped and grew as it sank behind the quaint red-and-cream houses. Across the gully was a road, and, facing me, a tiny café.

There was no sound but the slow pacing of a sentry as he approached and passed.

Gradually, as the sun sank, a wind sprang up. It sighed in the limes and spread their heavy scent. The gold of the sun spread over the western sky and deepened into orange and red. Clouds began to appear, at first fleecy, high, and slow-moving, golden and lovely, and then bigger, more menacing, heavy-bellied, and tinged with red.

The evening darkened, and the sun where it sank left a live and angry glow, like the heart of a lime-kiln. The glow poured its rays through the narrowing gaps in the cloud. One could almost feel their warmth. I listened for the roar of the flames.

A small group of Greeks in front of the café looked at the sky and went indoors, where a woman lit an oil lamp which threw her head into relief as she sat just inside the door.

The wind rose, and the noise of the leaves became louder and more urgent.

Then the woman began to sing, not loudly, but deep in her throat. The notes came purely, softened by the gusts of wind. She sang a sad song, which gave me my first experience of the strange oriental quality which brings an unreality into the most commonplace situations in the Balkans.

While it grew dark and while the brilliance of the western horizon was gradually quenched, while the wind grew stronger and the clouds raced faster, the song developed. In my imagination it told of a people oppressed, of suffering and tears; its low cadences held the sorrow of women bereft, and its more triumphant crescendos were like the heroism of a nation in chains.

The storm developed with the song. It drowned the cadences and howled and roared against the crescendos. As the last shreds of light flickered through the ragged edges of the clouds, the earth was suddenly lit with a flash of lightning. The silence that followed was threatening. But the song rang out before the thunder. It spoke to me of a man in the torture of wounds and the despair of lost battles.

The thunder came up from behind in the east. It growled and muttered like a distant battlefield, and the wind howled

like bombs. The lightning was sudden and blinding, and the silences were short and filled with awful promise.

Still the woman sang.

Then the rain came, suddenly, like a curtain dropping. It smashed against the leaves of the limes, and beat like machine-guns against the roof. The wind had dropped. The noise of the rain drowned all other sounds. The pools in the gully became bigger, linked, formed a stream and then a torrent. The noise of it was louder even than the rain. The lightning flashed and menaced, and the thunder was like guns in frenzy.

But it quickly passed, and the menace and the frenzy went out of it. The heavy rain stopped as quickly as it had come, and left only a healing drizzle. The wet leaves of the limes hissed in the exhausted wind that remained. Only the torrent in the gully was still loud.

And as it passed I became aware again of the woman singing. The song was different. The sadness had gone out of it. It was quiet and triumphant. Against the last muttering of thunder where the sun had gone down, and against the rattle of the torrent in the gully, the beautiful notes rang clear into the night, and seemed to tear asunder the ragged cloud-ends that flew like camp-followers after the storm. They tore them asunder and offered a greeting to the stars.

As the moon at last lit the battered earth with a healing and concealing glow, the song rose to its new and freest pitch, to a climax of exultation, to a beauty so exalting that I stayed all the night in the spell of it.

The storm could not have lasted more than an hour, but it had been daylight for a long time before I came to myself. I joined the officers' parade as it was marching out to be counted.

A few days later we were moved northward to Germany.

# II

The journey from Salonika to Germany began on the 23rd of July—a beastly day, during which we sat about on the parade-ground for hours in the hot sun, while the Germans checked over our baggage and made sure that they had the numbers right. I still had my compass, and was determined to keep it. I put it in a half-finished tin of jam, which I wrapped in a filthy and evil-smelling shirt. I hoped that the dirt would deter the guard from searching too closely, and I was right. He took one look at it and turned away in disgust. But in the search I lost my civilian clothes.

It was late in the afternoon before we were lined up in threes and started to march to the station. Guards with bayonets fixed marched along either side of us, their rifles at the ready in the crooks of their arms. By this time I was keyed up to making the first possible attempt to escape, and kept looking all along the road for an opportunity. But none came, for there was a guard who marched along right by my side, and who never relaxed his watch.

Towards six o'clock we arrived at the railway station, where there was a long train of cattle-trucks drawn up. We stood for some minutes on the platform, and then a guard came down the line, counting us into batches of forty and directing each batch into a wagon. I was standing in a three with Sandy and Bill, and as the guard came down he pointed to Sandy and said: 'Thirty-nine.' 'Forty' was Bill, and before I had realized it I was left to be number one of the next batch. As Bill and Sandy marched off, I turned and looked at the people immediately behind me. I knew none of them, except by sight. My spirits sank as I realized that, if I were to escape, it would be alone.

Our truck had recently been used for carrying coal. It was filthy, and everything we touched made us black. There was

not enough room for forty men inside it; we could only sit in the greatest discomfort, and to lie down without putting one's feet into somebody else's face was impossible. The doors, though wide, were stout, and the sentries locked and bolted them from the outside. To our surprise, there was no sentry posted inside the truck; they were in little sentry-boxes on the top, distributed along the train, about one for every three or four trucks. Each truck had two tiny windows, high up and strongly barred, one at either end.

Everybody had been given rations for five days, on a more generous scale than the one to which we had been used. That, together with what I had scrounged and saved, amounted to almost as much as I could comfortably carry in my haversack. The train pulled out from Salonika as it was getting dark. I spread out a blanket over the floor, and tried to get a few hours of sleep.

I have the gift of being able to sleep in most circumstances, and when I awoke it was near morning and half-light. I propped my shoulders against the jolting side of the truck and looked round. The other thirty-nine officers were huddled uncomfortably under blankets. One was coughing continuously and monotonously. Two at the other end of the truck were smoking and talking in undertones. The truck smelt faintly but depressingly, because the only means of sanitation was an old mess-tin, which had to be emptied out of the window. It was difficult not to spill it.

I turned my mind to escaping. The bars of the window looked fool-proof, but I resolved to try them. I got up, and, stepping uncomfortably over the forms on the floor, I managed to get to a window. There I found that the screws which fastened the bars into the window-frames were smaller than I had thought. They looked as though they might be turned with a strong penknife. I thought that during the day I would wait until someone opened a tin of meat, and then ask to borrow whatever he used.

We were passing through a valley, and as it grew light the prospect was cheering. The valley seemed fertile, with fruit-trees laden with ripe fruit—plums and apricots—and tall fields of maize.

After it had grown light, and most of the officers had eaten a frugal breakfast—for although there was no immediate shortage of food, we did not know when the journey might end—I began to sound out some of them in order to find, if possible, one who would be willing to come with me. Any undertaking is easier if there is someone with whom to share it. It was not long before an Australian whose face was familiar to me agreed to join forces.

We found also, at the far end of the truck, two young Sappers, called Denis Alabaster and Peter Maynard, who had made up their minds to seize the first opportunity. With them we conferred, and they told us that during the night they had succeeded in opening a sufficient number of the bars of one of the windows to allow us to scramble through. The window at their end of the truck was the farthest away from the sentry, and it was obviously the window to use. They, having already opened it, had first claim on it, and the Australian and I agreed to let them go first. The window, being high up, left a drop of at least six feet on to the track, and it was the Australian who devised a means by which we might drop off while the train was moving, without the danger of hurting ourselves too badly. Beneath the window was an iron bar, and it seemed possible to grip this with the hands, and swing our legs round until we were able to get a foothold on the buffer. This would also enable us to wait until the train was going fairly slowly before making the jump, because while on the buffers we would be out of sight of the guards. It would be necessary, of course, to wait until it was dark.

That day we had a foretaste of what the rest of the journey would be like if we did not succeed in escaping. The truck, with its two tiny windows, grew almost intolerably stuffy, and the smell got worse. It was very difficult to move about, and one had to sit most of the time in a cramped position on the floor. The coal dust in the truck had made us all filthy, and our clothes worse.

Shortly after midday the train was stopped, and the doors opened. Everyone was allowed to get out and remain within five yards of the train to relieve his bowels. The guards stood over us with fixed bayonets and their fingers on the triggers. We were a degrading sight, four or five hundred officers of the British Army, squatting along fifty yards of railway track. Luckily, the train commandant had chosen a deserted piece of country, and we were spared the indignity of having strange civilians watching our distress.

The day wore on, and towards night we drew into the goods yard of a large station. It was called Kraljevo, but nobody in the truck knew exactly where it was. We guessed that it might be in the middle of Jugoslavia. There we waited and waited, until long after it had grown dark. The guards had got down and were walking up and down the train, and the goods yard was brilliantly lit.

The Australian and I decided to try to get some sleep before the train moved. I awoke to find that it was two o'clock, and we still had not moved. We had only about two hours of darkness left. But finally, less than an hour and a half before dawn, after a great deal of whistling and shouting, the train drew slowly out. The two sappers immediately started work again on the window. They had already removed most of the screws and left them loose, so that it did not take more than a minute or two to have the window open. Before we had gone five miles they had both climbed out on to the buffers. Then there was an agonizing wait because the train was going much too fast. At last, as it slowed on an incline, they jumped off, not more than a second or two separating them. We heard the crunch of their feet as they hit the ballast at the side of the track. There was no alarm.

Immediately I hoisted myself up and thrust my shoulders through the gap. There was a moment of panic as I leant, upside down, and felt for the iron bar. I found it, and swung my legs round. Never in my life have I felt so strong. I found the buffer easily, and worked round on to it.

'Don't let your foot get caught between them,' said the Australian, as he started to follow.

From the buffer, putting my head round the side of the truck, I watched him easing himself out, with difficulty, for he was a big man. He got his hands on to the bar and started to heave. Then I heard a stream of furious language. His trousers were caught. For a second or two he struggled to get back and release them, and then, farther up the train, a guard shone his torch out into the night.

From where I stood facing the light, I could see that it was not shining directly on us, but the Australian only saw it from the corner of his eye. The language ceased abruptly and he let go of everything. With a noise of cloth rending he fell, apparently head-first, on to the track. The train was travelling at about twenty miles an hour.

I was left in a dilemma. If I jumped, I should risk spraining an ankle or worse. If I remained, I might lose touch with him. I decided to jump.

Closing my eyes, and facing the way the train was going, I gave a little sideways jump with both feet together. I remember relaxing completely, and breaking my fall on my elbows, as I had done many times on the rugger field. I was not in the slightest hurt. I wriggled as close to the wheels as I could, and lay quite still while the train passed over me. It seemed to take hours. At last, I watched the tail-light disappear in the distance, and stood up.

That was the greatest feeling of exhilaration I have ever known. My spirits bubbled over with joy. I stretched my arms and took deep breaths of the fresh air. Then I set out southward along the track to find the Australian.

It was the hour before dawn, and the night was very still and dark. There was a mist rising in the valley, and the country smelled sweet and cool. The smell of the Balkan countryside in summer is distinctive. It is sweet and yet pungent, and comes from rotting plums and manure. It lies heavily in fertile valleys in the still, warm nights.

Ten minutes passed before I found the Australian. I was anxious to find him, more to have someone with whom to share my exuberant spirits than because I was afraid that we might not meet. Presently his burly figure loomed up out of the gloom. I whistled softly, and heard him laughing to himself as he approached. He was limping slightly.

'Shake hands, Pommy,' he said, as we met. 'My name's Ron Jones.'

'I'm Chris Lawrence,' I replied as we shook hands heartily. 'How do you do?'

Ron Jones was in a state of amazement and happiness that equalled my own.

'It was as easy as falling off a log,' he kept on saying.

I threw away my battledress top, which I hid under a hedge. This left me dressed in a dirty pair of khaki drill slacks and a thick white sweater which I had scrounged from a deserted naval camp on Crete. It had been covered in blood when I found it, but I had washed most of it off. Ron was wearing drill shorts, and carrying his Australian greatcoat.

'I've humped that damn thing all the way from Mount Olympus to Retimo and back,' he said, 'and I'm damned if I'm going to get rid of it at this stage.'

One side of the railway embankment was covered with thick undergrowth, and in this we sat down to await daylight. We opened a tin of bully and ate it between us. When Ron offered me a cigarette, we discovered to our dismay that neither of us had any matches.

As we sat there, we discussed our plan of action. We knew that, in order to make our way to Greece, we should have to cross several hundred miles of enemy-occupied territory. As we did not know the country, it seemed impossible to do this without some contact and help from the local population. We decided to take the first opportunity of finding out their attitude.

As it grew light, we saw that we were in a shallow valley, running north and south, with wooded hills rising, a few miles away, on either side. A small river meandered through the fields of wheat and maize, and there was a brilliant white, straight road a few hundred yards from the railway. Visibility was limited, because the floor of the valley was undulating, and here and there were little clumps of trees.

At first, we thought that the country was very sparsely inhabited, but as we walked southward along the railway we caught glimpses of little groups of white houses, with red roofs, tucked in among the hills and woods. The corn was ready for cutting, and much of it lay in shocks on the ground. The tops of the maize in places were beginning to turn yellow.

'That stuff will make a standby for food,' said Ron. 'It will not be fully ripe for a month yet, but it tastes jolly good either raw or roast.'

Presently, we cut across a field from the railway on to the road, which was covered with white dust and almost glittered in the morning sunlight. After we had been walking for about an hour we met a peasant, and Ron took out a cigarette, and asked him, in sign-language, for a light. The peasant felt in his waistcoat pocket, and produced a piece of bark and a small flint. From another pocket he took a piece of steel shaped like a Jew's harp, and with this he struck sparks from the flint on to the bark. After several attempts a spark caught it and it smouldered. He then blew it into a glow, and offered it to Ron, who lit the cigarette from it. While this was going on, I examined the peasant's appearance.

He was a tall man, quite young and very dark, dressed in breeches of a drab grey material. His feet were bare and his clothes ragged. His waistcoat (he wore no jacket) was of a peculiar cut, with no buttons, and round the edges of it were the remains of some elaborate embroidery, done in black silk. His shirt was coarse and the sleeves were buttoned at the cuffs. When he had given Ron a light, he started to ask questions in a staccato language which was quite incomprehensible. Ron struggled with it for a few minutes, gave him a cigarette, which he took and lit from his flint and tinder, and then signed me with his head to come on. We left the peasant staring after us.

We came next to a pretty little village, with a few red-and-white houses straggling along either side of the road. I noticed that each group of houses was enclosed by a wooden fence. The village was beginning to wake up, and an ox-wagon, driven by a very old peasant, with grey hair and a large moustache, was lumbering along the road towards us.

'Dobardan,' said the peasant as he passed, and we grunted and smiled at him and walked on. Then, passing round a bend, we came face to face with two lorry-loads of German

soldiers. It was too late to do anything about it. We walked by unconcernedly, and the soldiers took no notice. But it was a blow to our self-confidence.

'Let's get off the road,' said Ron, and we crossed a field and sat down under a hedge. I lit a cigarette from his, and we wondered what to do next. Suddenly, quite close, there was the noise of a train. We turned to watch it, only to discover that it was a troop-train full also of German soldiers. They looked at us disinterestedly. Only the comic-film expression of horror on Ron's face took the sting out of the situation.

'We must get right out of this,' he said, 'and keep nearer the hills.'

Picking up our haversack and greatcoat, we set off again, this time through the fields, moving away from the road and railway. We came to the river, and found that it was no more than a broad, shallow stream, bordered with willows and alders. The sun was by this time getting up, and the air was warmer, giving promise of a boiling summer day. The stream was fast-flowing and clear, and the feel of it round our legs as we waded across gave us the idea that we were both very dirty and unshaven. We chose a place where we would be well screened by the trees—there was a blackthorn there which reminded me of England—stripped off our clothes and washed. Then we put some of them back, and started to shave. It was while we were both engrossed in this way that I looked up, and was confronted by a little man who became our first Serbian friend.

He was, as I have said, small, and his face consisted chiefly of large, drooping, pointed moustaches, and a pair of very bright black eyes that looked out over the top of them. He was dressed in widely cut breeches of subfusc brown. Brightly embroidered socks came up to his calves, and his sandals, which had curly toes, were fastened with long, well-polished black leather thongs that wound round and round his ankles. He had a very white shirt, collarless, and with the cuffs buttoned, and his waistcoat was bright blue and embroidered round the edges with black silk. It had no buttons, and splayed open in the front to reveal a red cummerbund. He was leaning on a scythe and looking interestedly at us. For a few moment I stared at him, and then I nudged Ron, and made him look up too.

'What do we do about this?' I asked him, in an undertone.

'Nothing at all,' said Ron. 'He'll probably get fed up and go away.' And he nonchalantly went on shaving.

But he had underrated the perseverance and curiosity of the Balkan peasant. The man did not go away, and under his gaze we both finished shaving and packed up our things.

As I was pulling my sweater over my head, the little man spoke; and I do not know to this day what he said, though for a long time afterwards I regarded it as the turning-point in my career, for it started a very long train of events. Receiving no answer, he repeated his remark twice, and then elaborated it at some length.

Ron said: 'We must put a stop to this.'

With a generous gesture, he pointed at his stomach, walked up to the peasant, who did not give ground, and said:

'English, got me? English—me and him, English, compree?'

When this fluent burst of Esperanto had no effect, except to make the little man open his mouth and gape, Ron tried another language.

'Engleesh,' he said, several times.

At last the peasant caught on. 'Englische!' he said. 'Inglezi!'

He appeared to go into a brief rapture, from which he unwound himself at high pressure, and, making a dive at Ron, embraced him warmly and kissed him several times on the mouth. Then he released him and made for me. I hastily found a lot of soap that wanted washing off from behind my ears, and buried my face in the stream. When I came up for air, it was to find the danger past. Ron and the stranger were engaged in a conversation which they were carrying on in violent sign-language, and in which, as far as I could gather, Ron was doing most of the talking. He was rubbing his stomach and pointing to his mouth. Alternately, he was sucking his thumb and making rather vulgar drinking noises.

The peasant understood very well, for he grinned. (One sensed the grin behind the moustaches. All that happened in fact was that the ends trembled slightly.) Then he burst into a flood of explanations and beckoned to us to come with him. In the corner of a field in which he had evidently been working, he had left his lunch in a highly coloured woven bag, from which he now produced a small wooden flask which he handed to Ron. Ron looked at it doubtfully, and passed it on to me.

'You can have first go at this, Cobber,' he said.

I took out the stopper and sniffed it. It smelt faintly alcoholic. I took a large mouthful and swallowed, and for a moment thought that I must have been given an acid poison. It burned all the way down. Ron and the little man roared with laughter as I choked and wiped the tears out of my eyes, but as soon as I had recovered from the first shock, and drunk some more rather more carefully, I found that it was excellent stuff, which warmed you to the very toes, and tasted faintly sweet. It was our first introduction to *rakija*—*shlivavitsa* as it is usually called in Serbia—which is distilled from plums. It is the national drink nearly all over Jugoslavia.

The peasant led us across several fields until we came to a corner sheltered between a copse and two fields of maize, which was fully six feet high. There he bade us sit down and wait, and he disappeared along a pathway through the copse. Still half-distrustful, we sat down. The sun rose steadily in the sky, and we realized that we were very tired. We lay back on the warm grass, and both fell asleep.

Through a mist of drowsiness, I heard a voice say:

'Sprechen Sie deutsch?'

I did not at first open my eyes, and the voice insisted:

'Sprechen Sie deutsch?'

Then I looked up and saw a slim young man in a well-tailored suit standing over me. I half-expected him to take a revolver from his pocket, but he only said again:

'Sprechen Sie deutsch?'

'Nein,' I said, sitting up.

'Parlez-vous français?' he said.

'Oui.'

'I am a Polish engineer,' he said in French, 'and I am working near here. So far the Germans have left me alone, because I was here before the war. The peasant who found you this morning asked me if I would come and talk to you, and tell you that he wants to help you. Do not be afraid any more, because you are now among friends. How did you come here, and what can we do to help you?'

'Just a moment,' I said, 'I must consult my friend.'

'Ron,' I said, and woke him up. 'Here's a man who speaks German and French and says he's a Pole and wants to help us. What shall I tell him?'

Ron looked at the Pole, and then rubbed the sleep out of his eyes and looked all round.

'There seems to be only one of them,' he said. 'If he weren't friendly there would be sure to be more. Tell him the truth.'

I told the Pole as much about us as I thought he might like to know, except that I promoted Ron to Major and myself to Captain. I said that our plan was to make our way to Greece, and from Greece to Turkey, either by boat or overland. I said that we should be glad of food and maps, and asked if he thought the peasants were on the whole friendly or not, and whether it would be possible to avoid the Germans.

The Pole said at once that our plan was completely impossible. It was impossible to cross Macedonia on foot—it had been dangerous even in peacetime, especially near the Albanian border. Now the country was completely disorganized, because the Germans had let loose the Albanians on one side and the Bulgarians on the other, and they were unofficially fighting each other for odd strips of land. The Serbs, who were the only people who in peacetime would have been friendly, were now being persecuted and driven from their homes. The Bulgarians and Albanians had taken over whole villages, and bands of Albanians, under Italian

tutelage, were pillaging and murdering wherever they could find something worth taking. They would, he said, kill us for our boots or in the hope of finding gold fillings in our teeth.

I asked him whether it might not be possible to avoid all this by keeping to the main roads, and he replied that though we might in that way avoid being killed by bandits we would certainly be arrested by the Germans, who maintained garrisons in all the villages along the valley.

'What do you suggest that we should do?' I asked him.

'Stay here,' he replied, 'at least for the time being, until things settle down. It is possible that it will be easier in a month or two. You could live in the mountain villages here in Serbia almost indefinitely. The Germans very seldom leave the main roads, and always give warning when they do. And though there are traitors in the towns, the villagers are patriotic. You could stay here, in Vitkovats, with this peasant, but you may find that it is rather too near the main road.'

While we had been talking, Ron had been examining the knee which he had injured when he fell out of the train. Though he had limped slightly during the morning, neither of us had paid much attention to it. There was a cut, which did not seem very serious, in the skin, and the knee itself was slightly swollen. But as soon as he sat down it began to stiffen up, and now looked very inflamed.

'That news suits me all right,' said Ron, when I had translated what the Pole had said, 'because it's evident that I shan't be able to move for some time. I've had trouble with this knee before, and the last time it took a month or two before I could walk properly. But don't let that influence you in what you think you ought to do.'

While we were talking, the peasant returned. He had several enamel bowls tied up in white cloths. When he opened them, he let loose a very savoury smell. There were potatoes, cooked in milk until the crust was brown, and beans, which seemed to have been boiled for hours in a rich old stock (as, indeed, they had). There was also white peasant cheese, covered in thick, fresh cream, and yellow maize bread, hot from the oven. From one pocket he took out several handfuls of ripe plums with the bloom still on them, and from another some cigarettes—an excellent Serbian variety called Morava, which for me, during the next year, constituted the height of smoking luxury.

As we ate, other peasants, dressed like the first, whose name, we learnt, was Zhivan, came and sat down with us. The Pole's eyes twinkled, and he said that he would leave us to eat.

'For', he said, 'if I stay, you will be able to do nothing but answer questions. If I go, they will have no interpreter, and you can say you don't understand.'

Under the benevolent eyes of the peasants, Ron and I quietly made pigs of ourselves. This simple fare was heavenly after our prison-camp diet.

When the peasants saw that we had eaten our fill, they tried to satisfy their curiosity, some with a few words of German, and one with a little French, but mostly in sign-language, at which Ron was very good. Suddenly, Ron said: 'Excuse me,' and disappeared into the maize, in a great hurry. For ten minutes I had to cope with the peasants alone, but before the end of it I fully understood his trouble. As soon as he came back, I followed his example. The truth was that our stomachs had been weakened by the food we had been eating in the camp, and the sudden meal of rich food, and the plums that we had eaten, were having their inevitable effect. The peasants must have thought that we had a dislike for each other's company, for they never got us together for more than a few minutes at a time during the whole of that afternoon. It was most embarrassing.

At last the Pole came back, and told us that, as soon as it began to get dark, Zhivan would take us to his house, where we could 'have something to eat' (we groaned inwardly) and spend the night. He added that he would walk into a neighbouring village, where he had some student friends, and consult them as to the best plans for our future.

To Zhivan's house was about a mile. I remember, as we walked, the smell of the hot summer evening, and the hard mud ruts of the cart-track which was the village street, and which felt friendly and familiar under my boots. Though it was dusk, I could see that the houses were one-storied, built irregularly, with plenty of space between one and the next. They were separated from each other and from the road by rough wooden paling, but no attempt had been made to make their gardens prepossessing. They were essentially peasant and utilitarian, with occasional cultivated patches growing cucumbers, tomatoes, and garlic in irregular rows. Here and there there was a half-acre of vineyard, and they nearly all seemed to have at least an acre of orchard, mostly of plum trees.

Zhivan's house was in the middle of the village; there were three little square bungalows and some sheds in his farmyard, and his garden seemed better tended than most. In the middle of a patch of grass in front of the largest of the bungalows was a mulberry tree (though I failed to recognize it until the next day, because of the darkness), and round it some wooden benches. Most of the village seemed to have congregated to welcome us, and thirty or forty people of all ages, mostly men, were waiting round the tree. Zhivan rather proudly led us to the centre of the group, and bade us sit down. There was a pretty little girl of about sixteen, who spoke excellent French, and acted as our interpreter. She told us that she was a student in the *lycée*—'gymnasium', she called it—in a near-by town. For more than an hour I answered, through her, innumerable questions, some of them intelligent, and some of them almost incredibly naïve, about ourselves, and England, and what peasant life was like there. The last question was difficult to answer.

It was quite dark before Zhivan indicated to our new hosts of friends that we were probably tired—he never spoke a truer word—and that it was time to go to bed.

The room in which we slept was small and square, with a double bed, roughly fashioned in the shape of a shallow rectangular box with legs. In this shallow box was a huge mattress, stuffed with feathers—for peasants, the height of luxury. There were no sheets, and the bed covers were rough homespun blankets, bright red.

Other furniture was extremely primitive, and, in the room which we occupied, there was only one small window, which looked as though it had never been opened. We had also thought it prudent to keep the door shut during the night, for it opened, not into another part of the house, but straight into the yard.

As soon as we awoke, we put on trousers and shirt, and went out to wash. Outside the house one of Zhivan's daughters was waiting for us with a pitcher of water. She gave us soap, and poured the water in a thin continuous stream from the mouth of the pitcher on to our hands, so that we could swill our faces. We found out later that this is almost all the washing that a peasant ever does.

We asked about a shave. Zhivan's daughter indicated that she thought that it was too much that a guest should be expected to shave himself—at least, that is what we thought she indicated, and it seemed that we were right. In these early days, most of our impressions were guesswork. She then looked at our faces, and appeared to decide further that we did not need shaving at all. (Most peasants shave about once a week.) We completed our rather scrappy toilet by cleaning our teeth, greatly to the diversion of Zhivan's younger children, who, from the interest they took, might never have seen it done before.

Zhivan then appeared and beckoned us with much ceremony to a bench under the large mulberry tree in front of the house. (This was the first time in my life I had ever tasted mulberries, and I was disappointed, for they were almost tasteless.) When we had sat down, one on either side of Zhivan, his eldest daughter came from the house carrying a tray on which were three glasses of water, three spoons, and what appeared to be a dish of jam. She offered it first to Ron, who was nonplussed. Zhivan, perceiving that we were being introduced to a custom new to us, showed us what to do. He took a spoonful of the jam, put it into his mouth, and washed it down slowly with sips from his glass of water. It is, indeed, an excellent custom, and an excellent substitute for early morning tea. The 'jam' is not jam as we know it, but fruit preserved in syrup, in a special way that the Jugoslavs have. They called it *slatko,* and it is sweet, and yet retains the full flavour of the original fruit. We wished it were polite to have more than one spoonful, but, while we were hesitating, Zhivan's daughter took the tray away.

Then she came back, bearing three little glasses and a tiny decanter.

'If this is alcoholic, and I very much suspect it is,' said Ron, 'it will be the first time I have ever drunk before breakfast. I hope it's not too strong.'

It was alcoholic, and it was very strong. With some ceremony, Zhivan poured out three glasses of an almost colourless liquid. He then took off his hat (peasants wear their hats all the time; it was a funny little round affair, little bigger than a skullcap). He said a prayer and crossed himself, and drank down his glass of the liquid. Ron and I exchanged glances. Remembering the experience of the previous day, I took a sip from mine and found that, though fiery, it was delicious. It warmed the cockles of the heart. It was indeed excellent, even before breakfast.

Zhivan filled the glasses again, and the ceremony was repeated, this time without the prayer. Hardly had we put the glasses back on the tray when Zhivan filled them for the third time.

'I wonder', said Ron musingly, 'exactly how long this goes on for?' But the third was apparently the last, and it was with some relief that we saw Zhivan's daughter remove the tray.

The *shlivavitsa* had given us splendid appetites, and we began to wonder when breakfast was due to appear. It was with some surprise that we saw Zhivan's second daughter come out of the house carrying a tray with three more, much larger, glasses. They were filled with a hot, steaming, brownish liquid, which smelt very alcoholic indeed. Zhivan proposed a long toast. He then picked up his glass and clinked it against ours. We found that this was a kind of punch, very sweet, and certainly very strong. But it was even more to be recommended than cold *rakija.* This, we decided, must be the last, the *pièce de résistance,* and we drank it with gusto.

But no sooner had we finished than Zhivan's eldest daughter appeared carrying three more, and when they were finished his wife brought us yet another three.

All this drink so early in the morning appeared to have no effect on Zhivan, but I began to feel distinctly dizzy, and Ron's face was an ominous salmon pink. When we had finished all the punch—we had had three large glasses each—Zhivan produced—I did not notice who brought it—another huge decanter. This contained just ordinary plain *rakija*—once distilled, as opposed to the first two lots, which had been made from the stronger variety, which is distilled twice, though these were distinctions which we had yet to learn. This, I thought, must correspond to the third-grade wine in the Bible, with which the guests filled up the corners when they had already had enough. We drank it in tumblers, and Zhivan was not content until we had emptied three apiece.

It was with some relief that we now saw a procession of Zhivan's womenfolk—we were no longer in a state to distinguish between them—appear from the house with gargantuan piles of food. They brought cold chicken, hot pork, cabbage cooked with bits of bacon (this sounds rather horrible, especially for breakfast, but is quite good when you get used to it, and very filling), potatoes served with paprika sauce, fresh white cheese covered with a sort of Devonshire cream, new bread, hot from the oven, stuffed chillies, assorted dried meats, and numerous peculiar dishes the nature of which we could not even guess as we were eating them.

We needed that breakfast to soak up some of the alcohol. It lasted about an hour and a half. I freely admit that Ron and I made pigs of ourselves. My only excuse is that we did not know what was coming. Hardly had we finished when Zhivan indicated that we were to go visiting. This he did by means of signs, and it is surprising how well you can converse in sign-language when there is no other means of communication. Ron was particularly good at it.

Feeling far too full and hazy to care very much what happened for the next hour or two, we followed Zhivan up the village street. All the peasants had taken the day off to see what we looked like, and stood about in groups at various houses on the way. Of course, there might not have been nearly as many peasants as I imagined there were, because the groups merged into each other in the most extraordinary way. Our little interpreter was there, and the question I seemed to keep on answering, among others, was why Ron, being an Australian, was not black. I found this very difficult, and Ron, when I called upon him to explain, only went into a huff.

Finally we reached the house of the mayor, which was no different, as far as we could see, from any of the other houses. It was crowded with peasants.

'This,' said Ron seriously, 'is what the books call a goodly company. Ha!' And he continued to murmur 'a goodly company' at intervals through the ensuing conversation, in which he took no part. Presently he broke in on an extremely tricky bit of translation into French, to ask me what the time was.

'Quelle heure est-il?' I asked the little interpreter.

'I wish you weren't so damned clever,' said Ron, in an aggrieved voice. 'Even I knew the French for that.'

'Half-past twelve,' said the little interpreter.

'Time for lunch,' said Ron, and at intervals went on murmuring 'Time for lunch' in a grumbling undertone. That it was in fact time for lunch was soon impressed on us, for the mayor's wife entered the room, carrying a large tray with glasses of water and a dish of *slatko*.

It occurred to me and to Ron simultaneously that this might be the beginning of the pre-luncheon drinking bout. And we were right. Hardly had we eaten the jam when the liqueur-glasses appeared. The ceremony of the removal of caps and saying a prayer was repeated, and three glasses of hot *rakija* followed the three glasses of liqueur, and three tumblers of cold *rakija* followed the three glasses of hot. By the time luncheon—a Brobdingnagian luncheon—appeared (and appeared is the right word, for I did not notice it brought in), it seemed to me that the number of guests had doubled. Zhivan's face kept wavering and joining itself with the face of his brother the mayor. Ron's salmon pink had changed to a deep puce.

Luncheon was, in fact, a larger edition of breakfast, with the addition of about half a sheep. We struggled through it; conversation became difficult. Though my French grew more and more fluent, the little interpreter appeared to get more and more stupid. For some unaccountable reason she kept laughing, and I remember that this annoyed me not a little.

After luncheon the mayor told us, through the interpreter, who by this time was roaring with laughter, that he had some excellent wine, and that he would be greatly honoured if we would give him an opinion of it. Feebly I protested that we had already drunk and eaten so much that our palates would not be discerning. But the little slut of an interpreter gave me no support. The mayor seemed surprised and a little hurt. I appealed to Ron.

'What do you mean, no judge of wine?' said Ron. 'I'll have you know that I come from one of the best wine-producing regions of the world. No judge of wine indeed!'

I rather rashly pointed out that nobody took much account of Australian wine, anyway, and this was an unfortunate move.

'Tell our friend there', said Ron with great dignity, 'that, if his wine is any good at all, I shall be pleased to taste it and give him an opinion (*hic*). You might add also that Australians consider that the right time to drink their wine is after a good meal such as we have just had.'

'Qu'il apporte ce qu'il veut,' I said to the interpreter, giving up the ghost.

The mayor beamed all over his face.

'I have three sorts,' he said. 'You shall try them all.' We staggered to the door of the cellar. The mayor called for three enamel jugs which he filled from three different barrels. All three wines were very good, though I could not distinguish between them. The little interpreter drank most of mine. The afternoon wore on. . . .

Presently the mayor and Zhivan said, producing huge turnip watches from their pockets, that it was time for us to

move on. We were to visit their uncle, a venerable old gentleman who had fought in several campaigns against the Turks, and led a minor guerrilla rising against the Bulgars in the last war. Ron and I were in a far too malleable condition by that time to raise any valid objection.

I cannot remember much about the dinner, except that it only differed from lunch in that it was gayer. The venerable old warrior sang patriotic songs, and Ron stood up and with great solemnity gave a rendering of 'Waltzing Matilda'. He then sat down in a corner, where he remained for the rest of the evening.

The party broke up noisily in the small hours, and Zhivan, Ron, and I went home with our arms round each other's necks. Ron gave a long dissertation, floridly illustrated, on fruit-farming in Victoria State, and continued with it long after we got to bed: I fell asleep in the middle of it. I do not think I have in any single day either eaten or drunk so much, or woken up after an alcoholic party with so small a hangover.

# III

Ron's knee, where he had injured it in jumping out of the train, was in a very bad state, and he could only limp short distances with any comfort. It was both cut and swollen, and looked as though it might well take several days to heal up. Now it is an unwritten rule among escapers that when two are together, and one falls ill or is injured, the other continues alone, but I was more than willing to wait until he was fit to make the journey. It was Ron who, unselfishly, insisted that, if I wished it, the rule should be applied, and that I should go on alone.

Before we decided just what we should do we called a conference, at which the Polish engineer presided, and there were present some student friends of his, who had brought small-scale maps of the country. The Pole opened the discussion by saying that already too many peasants knew of our presence in the village to make it safe for us to stay, and though I could see that he had a suggestion to make, I cut him short by outlining my plan for crossing Macedonia on foot, 'living rough', and speaking to nobody. This the whole meeting dismissed as impossible almost without considering it, and for the same reasons which the Pole had already given us.

One of the students proposed that we should move, that or the next evening, after dark, into a village farther into the hills where we could stay safely for as long as we liked. Neither Ron nor I was willing to stay and do nothing indefinitely, but we both agreed that, with his knee in the state it was, he would do well to find a place in which he could rest safely. We did not then believe what was in fact almost literally true, that we could have stayed in a mountain village undiscovered, and probably unsuspected, until the end of the war, and we were surprised when both the

students and the peasants seemed to take it for granted that that was what we planned to do.

Finally we agreed that we would allow the students to take us farther into the hills where we would wait a few days to see whether or not Ron's knee would get better.

Ron and I enjoyed our new-found liberty, and left it entirely to the peasants to make arrangements for our move. They entered into it with gusto. For them it smacked of conspiracy, and there is nothing any Serb likes more than being mixed up in a conspiracy.

Two of the students came for us in the dead of night. They had insisted that we should tell nobody in the village except Zhivan that we were going. They called us by scratching on the window, and, when we came out, everybody talked in whispers. They had brought a horse for Ron.

Everything went very smoothly until Ron tried to mount. He had to get on from the offside because of his bad knee and no doubt that made him awkward. The horse reared and kicked and Ron came down very fast on his bad leg. Our blanket of silence was broken in no uncertain way by a stream of very loud Australian oaths.

With great secrecy we crossed the main road, and just beyond it we called in for a quite unnecessary meal at the house of the man who kept the village shop. He spoke English with an American accent, for he had been in the United States. The only reason for our stop there was to let him in on the conspiracy, because he was a friend of one of the students. He had very good wine. We stayed with him so long that it was almost light before we left, and Ron and I were very amused to think that in spite of all the secrecy and urgency which had enveloped our start, we had not yet gone more than about a mile and a half.

The next part of our journey we carried out at a great pace, and we were even more surprised and amused to find that 'well up in the hills' was only about five kilometres from the main road.

The peasant with whom we were going to stay was called David Davidovitch, and the village, Guberevats. David is a man for whom I have the greatest respect. He proved himself, then and later, to be both brave and resourceful. At that time I stayed with him only two days, for Ron and I had decided that I should go on, while Ron waited for his knee to heal. When I had made it quite clear that it was my intention to move south, David said that he would see me through the town of Kraljevo and across the River Morava, the bridges of which, he said, were all guarded by the Germans. He gave me a peasant's haversack in exchange for my army one, and a change of coarse linen underclothing made by his wife. He filled my haversack with food and my water bottle with *rakìja.*

We set out together and walked over the hills until we came to Kraljevo. In the first two hours of our journey I saw how unlikely it would be, provided I avoided main roads, that I should meet German soldiers, and also how it was possible that a village five miles from the main road could be regarded as 'well into the hills'. The village roads in Jugoslavia are no more than tracks, and about the only vehicle which can be used on them is an ox-wagon. In wild countryside—and in Jugoslavia most of the countryside is wild—the villages are extremely scattered, so that one can pass through them almost without meeting anybody.

When we came to the outskirts of Kraljevo, David indicated that it would be best for us to separate. I was to follow him at a distance of fifty yards. If he were stopped or questioned by a German I was immediately to turn back.

This plan worked very well. We passed over the bridge—guarded at both ends by a German sentry—without attracting anybody's notice. Kraljevo is a pleasant little town with a wide main street, yellow houses, and smart shops. It took us about a quarter of an hour to pass through.

About two kilometres on the south side, David stopped, and we shook hands. He turned and, leaving me alone, walked back along the dusty road with his long, even stride. I in my turn set out towards the south. I walked until evening, speaking to nobody and seeing only one German lorry.

Then I left the road, and looked for a sheltered spot in which to sleep.

A few miles south of Kraljevo, the countryside had changed. In a narrow valley encased in steep, rocky, black hills, there was the main road, a single-track railway and a river, which my map told me was the Ibar. During the day I had watched several trains going southward along the railway, and, as far as I could see, the trucks were unguarded. They were mostly closed trucks, in which it seemed a man might easily hide, and the trains moved slowly. The river was flowing from south to north and the general incline as I walked was upward.

As I stretched myself out in a rocky hollow where I proposed to sleep I was appalled at the hundreds of miles of hard walking in front of me. The trains seemed to offer an easier alternative. Moreover, I thought, if I could cross in four days or less, by train, the distance which we, as prisoners of war, had crossed in a day and a half, I should be able to live all through the dangerous part of the journey without worrying about obtaining any more food than that which I had with me. The next day I resolved to walk along the railway rather than the road. Soon the railway crossed the river and I crossed with it. There were frequent short tunnels in one of which I was once nearly caught by a train. It passed uncomfortably close.

It was nearly midday before a goods train overtook me. It was travelling, as most of them appeared to do, at about eight miles per hour. The engine was quite unguarded, and the first two or three trucks were empty. I chose one which had the door open, and, running alongside it, I jumped up and seized the door handle, and pulled myself on board. The truck was covered in, empty, and fairly clean. With some difficulty I shut the doors on both sides. Then I settled myself on the floor, and dozed.

The truck stopped at Rashka for about half an hour, and again, towards night, at Mitrovitsa, where there was a large notice in English on some buildings, which said, 'Trepča Mines, Limited'. There the engine was changed, and we waited for two trains to go out in the opposite direction.

At about eleven o'clock we moved off again, and I fell asleep.

I did not awaken until the sun was up. The country, though very high, was flatter, and the peasants, already working in the fields, were dressed in picturesque white costume. Some of them wore fezzes. I supposed that we were in Macedonia, and that they were the notorious Mohammedan population, against whom I had been warned.

Just after midday we ran into Skoplje, and were immediately shunted into the goods yard. There were not many people about in the yard, and I could not see any soldiers. I pushed the door slightly open, and, waiting for a favourable moment, got down on to the line, and walked along the train until I came to the end. Then I struck across boldly to where I could see there was a road. It seemed that I would have very little of the town to cross in order to get out of it on the northern side. I planned to walk a little way up into the hills and go round it. This I did without difficulty, pausing at the first stream to drink, for I was very thirsty, and the *rakija* which David had given me served rather to make my mouth drier. Within sight of the town I sat down on the hillside and ate a quick meal. I had an impression of tall, square, white buildings and wide streets, fairly busy, though from where I was, about three or four miles away, I could not make out any of the details. I did not rest, but walked on towards the south, planning to pick up another train some miles on that side of the town.

When I hit the railway again, I had not long to wait, though the trains were all moving faster owing to the downward slope of the valley. The first one was going so fast that I had to let it go by without trying to board it. I had to walk on for several miles before I came to a place where there was a slight slope up, at the top of which I waited. It was growing dark again before another goods train passed. I had had to let two passenger trains go by—one was a troop train with German soldiers—because I judged that the risk of detection was too great to make an attempt to ride in them worth while.

From Skoplje to Salonika is about 150 miles, and the main line runs down the Vardar Valley. It is a double track and, besides being downhill, is faster than most Balkan lines because there are not so many waits for trains to pass in the opposite direction. I kept a very good look-out in order to check up on our progress, for I did not want to land too near Salonika. On the other hand, I did want to be well south of the Greek border. I left the train eventually at Polikastron, and struck away immediately from the railway in an easterly direction. The country was at first flat and well-populated, and seemed prosperous. There was plenty of fruit, and I resolved to keep on walking if possible without speaking to people until my food ran out.

I was unshaven and very dirty, still wearing khaki drill slacks and an off-white sweater. The peasants looked at me curiously, but made no attempt to speak to me. There were Bulgarian soldiers about, but no Germans. Occasionally I saw a Greek policeman, whom I avoided as far as I could, judging that he would be the most likely to stop me and ask awkward questions. I spent the first night under a haystack, and, during the darkness, I washed and shaved in a stream, where I also refilled my water bottle. The map which I had was very little use, because it did not show sufficient detail, and the roads which I followed were not marked on it. I purposely avoided anything on which I might meet motor transport. All the time I moved south and east, keeping direction roughly by means of my compass. After three days, in each of which I reckoned that I must have covered about fifteen or twenty miles, I was hopelessly lost.

I thought at first that the place which I had reached was the seashore, but after I had walked along it for some way I perceived that it was the margin of a lake. I resolved to seek help.

Coming to a village, I walked about among the one-storied houses until I found the school. Behind it was a rocky piece of waste land, and there I sat down to wait until the children came out for dinner, and the schoolmaster would be free. I had determined to test out his French. I was not hungry, for I had fed all the time on fruit which I had stolen from orchards. There is so much fruit in the

Balkans that nobody pays much attention to you if, for instance, they find you shaking a plum tree and picking up a few pocketfuls of plums from the ground. Nevertheless, I was always very careful not to take unnecessary risks.

When the children came out at about midday, I made my way as unobtrusively as I could into the building. I had shaved again that morning, and wiped some of the dust from my boots and clothes, and smoothed my hair. But when I caught sight of myself in a mirror in one of the schoolrooms, which was empty, I had a shock. I was very brown, and my clothes were dirtier than I had thought. I could not imagine what effect I might have on a respectable schoolmaster if he found me in the building.

I think schoolrooms are much the same all the world over. In this one there were rows of desks, exactly similar to those in any English village school, and the prints round the walls—they represented elephants and tigers and other big game—were as badly coloured and drawn as they are at home.

I walked along a narrow corridor, which led to the only other room in the building, knocked on the door, and opened it. Inside was the schoolmaster, talking to a girl whom I took to be a mistress. I smiled as pleasantly as I could.

'Excuse me,' I said in French, 'but do either of you speak French?'

The man looked mystified, but the girl nodded and asked me what I wanted.

I told her that I was lost, and asked the name of the village.

'Where do you want to get to?' she asked me.

'To tell the truth, I don't know,' I said, feeling rather foolish. 'I am an English prisoner of war, escaped from the Germans, and I want to get to the coast.'

This had an immediate effect. The girl's suspicion seemed to evaporate immediately. She asked me if I was hungry, and I said I was. Then she spoke for a few minutes rapidly in Greek to the man, and he smiled at me, and nodded his head to whatever she had proposed.

'This is my husband,' she said. 'He is the schoolmaster and

I am his assistant. We live in the house across there'—she pointed it out, about fifty yards away, in the school grounds—'and we are just going across to have lunch. Would you like to come?'

'Will that be dangerous?' I asked.

'Not at all,' she replied. 'There are only a few Bulgarian soldiers in a village three kilometres away, and the policeman here is our friend.'

'It is not myself I am thinking of,' I explained, 'but I would not like to get you into trouble.'

'You need not worry about that,' she replied. 'I do not think there is anyone in this village who would give us away.'

When all the children had gone home, we went to their house. It was a tiny bungalow, with wooden floors. There were, the woman told me, two bedrooms and a living-room, with an oil stove for cooking. Water came from a well, and there was no bath. But it was a better house, she said, than most village schoolmasters had. They were lucky because, both being trained schoolteachers, they drew a little extra money for their joint services.

Lunch consisted of mutton stew made hot with red pepper and green paprika. Their bread was slightly brown and, though heavy, very palatable. While we ate, I first of all explained how I had come there, and the schoolmistress told me something of the state of the country. The whole of northern Greece had been taken over by the Bulgars, but there were some German troops in the larger towns, and posted at intervals along the railways. Fishing-vessels were controlled, but not so strictly in most parts that it was impossible to get aboard them. On the peninsula east of Salonika, the Germans were particularly active, for numbers of British prisoners had escaped from the camps at Salonika, and many of them had made for Athos, the most easterly of the three peninsulas. I was in a village called Kerdhillion, which took its name from the mountain across which I had approached it, and was a few kilometres from Lake Lantzas, which I found was marked on my map.

After we had had lunch, the schoolmistress showed me the two bedrooms. In the larger there was a carpet of great beauty, which had come, a hundred years ago, from Turkey. The furniture was a queer mixture of old and beautiful and new and utilitarian. On a low table by the bed, which was plain wood, unpolished and badly finished, there was a perfect pair of candlesticks, carved in Eastern fashion, and, while there was a wardrobe of some darkly polished heavy-looking wood, fashioned with plain but perfect craftsmanship, a modern chest of drawers, painted blue and covered with a hideous lace cloth, claimed far more of the eye's attention. The bedsteads were iron, with brass knobs, and looked as though they might have come from Birmingham.

There was no school that afternoon, and we sat in the living-room and discussed my future. As in Serbia, the Greeks seemed quite willing that I should stay with them indefinitely, and painted very black pictures of the difficulties of getting to Turkey by boat or overland. When I told them that I had more than 10,000 drachmae in proper Greek notes, they said that it was not enough to hire a fisherman to take the risk.

Finally, the schoolmaster said that he had a brother who was a peasant in a village called Peramos, not far from the coastal town of Kávalla. This, he said, was sixty or so kilometres away, but he would take me some of the way and, if he could, arrange for somebody else to take me on from where he turned back.

I repeated that I did not in any way wish them to run into danger on my behalf, but they both reassured me that the small risk they would take would in no way deter them from helping me. They wanted also to give me clothes, but I refused, for I knew that they were not well off, and clothes were scarce in wartime. Besides, I thought, my sweater and khaki drill were probably more serviceable than anything they might be able to spare.

I stayed a day with them, and I believe that nobody else in the village knew that I was there, for it happened that nobody came that evening. The next afternoon, the schoolmaster and I set out on our journey. We travelled as far as Orfani, which was about half-way, in a dog-cart behind a shaggy little mountain pony. We did not arrive until after midnight, and we spent the rest of the night in a café, where we drank a lot of red wine, not very good, with a name that sounded to me like *krassi,* and slept with our heads on a wooden table.

The schoolmaster gave me a letter for his brother, and scouted unsuccessfully round the village for another dog-cart to take me on to Peramos. He did succeed, however, in finding me a guide, who was the son of the sergeant of the local gendarmerie, and who had learned a little French at school.

Never, while I was travelling about in northern Greece, did I have much difficulty in getting food, nor was there any difficulty in avoiding the attention of the peasants. The Greeks seemed less intrusively curious than the Serbs, and did not often speak unless they were first addressed.

The schoolmaster's brother in Peramos was called Nikolai. He was tall for a Greek, and dressed in good clothes, and if it was his farm which supported the very nice little peasant's house in which he lived, it must have been a prosperous and well-farmed one. When we arrived, though it was about ten o'clock at night, he was sitting in the kitchen playing cards with the village priest. As soon as he had read his brother's letter, he made both me and my guide welcome. He called his wife, who had gone to bed, and bade her get up and prepare a meal, while the priest and I and the gendarme's son conversed in French. The priest was a little fat man with a red face, very small dark eyes, and a black beard. He wore a greasy cassock and his conversation was punctuated with asthmatic chuckles.

He and Nikolai immediately wanted to know what my plans were. When I told them, they entered into them enthusiastically, and we spent several hours discussing them. Nikolai could not speak French, and I could hardly keep awake while they talked Greek—a fast and ugly language—to each other for minutes on end. Finally they decided that the plan was feasible, though difficult, for the Bulgars kept a very strict watch on fishing-vessels. Peramos was principally a fishing village, and Nikolai and the priest had several friends who, they thought, might be willing to take me. The biggest element of doubt was the amount of money I had, which might not be enough to make a man willing to risk losing his livelihood and perhaps his life. Nikolai was quite willing that I should stay in his house for several days, while he contacted his friends for me.

I went to bed about midnight, and slept like a log until midday. Nikolai had impressed on me that I was not to leave the farmyard, for, he said, although the farm was isolated from the village, which it overlooked from the side of a small hill, it was visible both from the main street leading down to the harbour, and from the road which was the only approach.

Peramos lay in a little bay, about three kilometres across, and almost entirely enclosed. Its harbour was excellent, though probably not very deep. I spent the days sitting at the open window of a hayloft above the cattle-shed, watching the sea and the people moving about on the quay. Each evening the priest would call for Nikolai, and together they would set out for the village, where they were making inquiries for me. Nikolai would come back after dark, sometimes rather the worse for drink. After a week had passed with no result, I began to be despondent, but Nikolai's optimism was in no way quenched.

One morning, when Nikolai was cutting a field of barley behind the house with a scythe, the priest arrived in a state of great agitation. His cassock was dustier than ever, and sweat was pouring from his cheeks, which were purple with exhaustion. He had run all the way from the village, and it was uphill.

Someone, he said, had betrayed me, and a posse of Bulgarian soldiers, reinforced by Greek police, were on their way to the house to look for me. My first thought was to run up the hillside away from the village, but the priest said that I should be seen from the road before I had crossed the brow. I must hide.

We went into the farmyard, and looked round quickly.

There did not seem to be anywhere safe, except under the bran in the bin, and there I should be suffocated. I suggested the hayloft, but the priest said that was too obvious. With an element of panic, I indicated the well. It was built inside a lattice shelter, and the chain went down through a hole in the lid, which had to be lifted every time the well was used. Without waiting for the priest's consent, I took off my boots, drew back the cover, let down the bucket to its fullest extent, and, praying that the chain would hold, I went down it hand under hand. It was about forty feet deep. When I got to the surface of the water I wrapped the chain round one calf and hung there. I saw the priest looking anxiously down, the light making a sort of halo round his red face. Then, still looking more than anxious, he withdrew and replaced the lid.

At the bottom of a well one is peculiarly isolated from mankind. The noises from the upper world are completely cut off, and this is rather frightening, because one feels that it would be impossible to shout for help. It is also very cold, and the sides are slimy.

In that particular well I must have stayed for more than an hour, though it may have been less, for the minutes crawled and I lost count of them. I also had to keep very still for fear that the chain might rattle against the well cover and betray me to anyone near enough to hear it. I spent a great deal of the time reflecting that it would have to be a very strong staple to hold my weight for very long. The water below looked dark and I knew from having drunk it that it was very cold. Moreover, I did not know how deep it might be. I grew colder and colder, and occasionally had to change legs, for the chain wrapped round my calf gave me pins and needles. Worse, I began to get cramp in my arms. I started to pluck up courage to fall off into the water, and to find a hand-hold in the brickwork at the side of the well.

At last the well cover was lifted off. I looked up expecting to see a soldier or a policeman, but it was the faces of Nikolai and the priest that looked down. The priest told me to climb up, but when I tried I found that neither my arms nor my legs would work properly, and I nearly fell off.

'Wind me up!' I shouted.

'What?' said the priest.

I remembered that in my anxiety I had shouted in English. I could not think of the French for 'to wind'. After a moment's hard thought, I shouted desperately:

'Tournez la machine! Je ne peux plus grimper!'

'Comment?' said the priest.

'Il faut faire marcher la machine. Il faut m'aider. Je suis foutu. Impossible à grimper,' I screamed back.

At last they understood, and slowly wound me up. As I came up I had to fend myself off from the walls with my hands, and more than once almost let go. They were both very jubilant, an emotion which, in the pain of my legs, I could not share. I put on my boots and walked back with difficulty to the house. The priest told me that when Nikolai had discovered that I was hiding in the well he had with difficulty been restrained from pulling me up there and then, though the Bulgarians were already in the house, for he thought that I was fouling the water by swimming in it. All the while during the search he had kept throwing such anxious glances at it that the priest had several times thought that I was sure to be discovered. The Bulgars had carried out a very perfunctory search, and had not even looked in the hayloft, though they had gone thoroughly over the house. The Greek police had given no help at all.

I could not understand how they had found out where I was, until the priest explained that one evening in the village café Nikolai, who was a notorious drinker, had, in his cups, boasted loudly of my presence in front of a crowded room. There had even been Bulgarian soldiers in the crowd, and no doubt one of them had understood. Though both the priest and Nikolai were anxious for me to stay, I insisted that it was time for me to be moving on.

The priest and I went into a conference about my next plan, and I said that I would try to cross the Turkish frontier on foot. We looked at the map together, and the priest agreed that the easiest way would be to try to travel by rail as I had done before. There is a single-track railway which runs eastward through Thrace as far as the border, where it turns north into Bulgaria.

There was also, said the priest, a lorry that went two or three times a week from Peramos to Xanthi, carrying fish and products of the local farms. If I wished he would try and arrange with the owner for me to travel that far with him.

The next day the owner of the lorry came to the farm. He had already heard that I was there, and it was half out of curiosity that he came. We had great difficulty in persuading him to let me ride with him, and eventually I offered him 1,000 drachmae—an outrageous price. He raised it to 2,000, and finally, because I was desperate, I agreed to give him 1,750, the 750 to be paid in advance.

The lorry was an old and battered Fordson, which rattled up to the farm in a cloud of dust and with a noise like a battalion of tanks. Nikolai's wife gave me a haversack full of bread—seven or eight pounds—and two pounds at least of salami, and as much white cheese as I could stuff into my haversack. I gave Nikolai 1,000 drachmae for his pains, and he accepted it unwillingly. Then I took my leave. The priest had already given the lorry-driver instructions that he was to leave me on the most deserted piece of road that he could find within four or five kilometres of Xanthi.

The journey was very uncomfortable, judged by English standards, but at least we rattled along at about eighteen miles per hour. The driver talked Greek to me incessantly, and the monotony of it almost lulled me to sleep. It was the lorry that kept me awake, for it had no springs to speak of, and the driver went straight ahead regardless of potholes and flints in the road.

We crossed the railway and shortly afterwards the driver stopped and indicated that I was to get out. I paid him his 1,000 drachmae, and he drove off. I left the main road almost immediately, and followed a cart track which took me due eastward, judging from my map, to the south of Xanthi.

I walked for the rest of the day, and spent the night as usual, under a haystack.

In case it should be thought that sleeping under a haystack is pleasant, I hasten to add that one usually sleeps only very fitfully. All the Balkan haystacks under which I slept were infested with fleas, or some other small, biting insect, which more than offset the comfort of the hay and the warmth it gave off. Moreover, when moving on foot through the countryside, I usually preferred a thickly populated place to a wild one. The peasant who is isolated is far more curious than one who habitually sees many strangers. Actively hostile people, like policemen and Bulgarian soldiers, were easily avoided, for I could see them coming. The chief danger was the ordinary peasant, who could not resist the temptation to ask questions and, getting no answer, to grow angry or suspicious.

In the morning I shaved and drank at a stream, and then struck in a north-easterly direction in an attempt to find the railway line. I was not very far away from it, but I waited all day before a train passed in the right direction, and that was travelling much too fast to be any use. The country was very flat, and there did not appear to be an incline on which I could wait. I could see a main road about a mile away to the north, and decided to try my luck there. Thus, walking sometimes on the road and sometimes just off it, I came in the middle of the second day to Komotini. Here the railway station is on the south side of the town, and beyond it the line passes over a stream, which I waded; then I waited not more than half a mile from the station for a train to pass.

This time I had not long to wait. I jumped on easily, and before night had arrived on the coast near Alexandroupolis, not ten miles from the Turkish frontier. Consulting my map, I found that Turkey was on the far side of the River Maritza, and that I was also separated from it by a narrow tract of marshy land. I therefore set out from the coast in a north-easterly direction, aiming to cross the frontier near Souflion, where I thought that the river might be smaller.

I had not gone far before I discovered that moving about in this territory was a very different matter. The villages were thick with both German and Bulgarian soldiers, and I had to go very warily. Fortunately the coastal plain soon ended, and I began to climb steadily, though to no very great height.

At the end of another two days on foot I had almost run out of food, and had only a small and very stale piece of bread, and some salami which was beginning to look offensive. This, I decided, was far enough north. Coming to a river which was little more than a stream, and which I knew must eventually lead into the Maritza, I followed it. I was much nearer to the frontier than I had thought, for I very soon found myself on the floor of the river valley. And straight in front of me, less than a mile away, there was what looked very much to me like a frontier post. I left the road and stalked it, and found that it was manned by Bulgarian soldiers and Greek police. I turned away from the little road on which I had been moving, and pushed through some bushes on the side of a tiny hill. As I climbed I could see the river about five hundred yards beyond the frontier post. There was a bridge and, on the other side, in Turkey, a village. Very elated, I crept into a clump of blackberry bushes, and, taking a compass bearing on a tree which stood out against the horizon, lay down to wait for nightfall. Although I was hungry, I resolved to save my food for a final meal before I crossed the frontier. After a few minutes I dozed.

I awoke in the half-light to hear noises of people beating in the undergrowth; the sound of feet, and talking. I lay still; there was nothing else to do. Then, through the same gap through which I had passed, appeared a Bulgarian soldier, with a rifle. He strode forward and seized me by the shoulder and pulled me to my feet.

He shouted a question at me which I did not understand, and then felt in my pockets, presumably for arms, but he found only my money and my compass. He then dragged me by the arm through the bushes, until he found two more soldiers and a peasant, who had presumably led them to the spot. Between them they marched me to the frontier post, where there were several more Bulgarian soldiers under the command of a sergeant. They addressed several questions to me in Bulgarian and Greek, and I told them, in as many languages as I could think of, that I was English. They could not, or would not understand, and the sergeant grew angrier and angrier. Finally, one of them beat me over the head with a long truncheon and I fainted on the floor.

When I came round I was in a small room containing only a raised plank bed on one side and with a small barred window. The door was stout and provided with a peep-hole. My head was aching furiously and I was not very clear in my mind. A draught of water from a pitcher on the floor did little to revive me. It was still half light, but I had not the energy to find out whether it was night or morning. I lay on the bed with my hands under my head and tried to fight off the waves of nausea which kept recurring.

After a time, which may have been short or long, there was a noise of footsteps outside the door, and the sound of a key in the lock. An officer entered, with an escort of two soldiers, and I pulled myself painfully off the bed and stood up.

In execrable French the officer, who appeared to be Greek, asked me who I was and what I was doing, and I told him. I also added that I had had nothing to eat for a long time, and that I had been hit over the head for no reason by one of his men.

'Que vous n'avez pas mangé, c'est votre faute,' he replied, and asked me if I had any documents to prove my statement. I had no documents, of course, except my identity card as a British officer, which I produced. He took it and put it in his wallet. He then ordered his soldiers to search me again, which they did, none too gently, and departed, locking the door behind them.

For many hours I lay on the hard bed and looked at the dirty, whitewashed ceiling. A colony of flies had invaded the cell and spent their time either tormenting me or buzzing round in a small cloud in the centre of the room.

Presently a soldier brought me a bowl of soup with a few beans in it, and some dark bread, for which I was very grateful. When I had eaten it I fell asleep until the morning, when another guard woke me and ordered me to sweep out the cell. After I had finished he brought some foul black coffee, unsweetened, and some more bread, this time made from maize.

# IV

My head had almost stopped aching, and by the time I had drunk the coffee and eaten the bread I had sufficiently recovered to take stock of the situation. I soon came to the conclusion that it was not so bad as I had at first imagined. At least I was not in the hands of the Germans, and, I thought, the Bulgars were still neutral. That meant internment and probable communication with a British consul. It was not any use talking to the man who brought the coffee and bread, for I could hardly make him understand a word I said, and he was a man with a scowling face and manner. I did manage to make him understand, however, that I wanted to see the sergeant, and from him I obtained permission to wash and shave. Instead of bringing me my own things, he brought me a filthy shaving brush and some oily soap and a cut-throat razor which might have been used for sharpening pencils.

Some time in the afternoon the cell door was opened again and an officer came in. He was dressed in a tight-waisted uniform and had immaculately manicured hands. Speaking almost perfect English, he asked me a number of questions about where I had been taken and whence I had arrived on the Turkish frontier. He also wanted to know the names of the peasants who had helped me, but I would not tell him. When I asked him what was going to be done with me, he said that he had come from Pithion, which is a Greek frontier town, to fetch me. From there I was to be put on a train and taken under escort to Sofia.

'What will happen to me there?' I asked. 'Shall I be interned?'

'I do not think so,' he replied. 'It is likely that you will be handed over to the Germans and sent back to Germany.'

'Is that what you usually do with prisoners of war whom you recapture?' I asked.

He replied that it was, but usually they were merely sent back to the camp at Salonika, from which most of them had escaped.

'Then why is that not going to happen to me?' I insisted.

'You ask far too many questions,' he replied. 'These are orders from the military commandant at Plovdiv.'

I told him that since the morning I had had no food, and was hungry.

'Have you any money?' he asked.

'I had until the soldiers who arrested me took it away from me,' I replied.

He asked me how much it was, and said that he would see that it was kept for me. I could buy food, cigarettes and wine with it, he said, and gave an order to the guard.

That evening I had quite a reasonable supper, which the guard brought from the nearest village, together with a bottle of the ordinary red wine of the district, and some Macedonian cigarettes. He was most punctilious about telling me how much it cost and doing a little sum with a stub of pencil, which he kept licking, to show me how much I had left.

The next day we set out by truck for Pithion, and stopped at Dhidhimótikhon for lunch. The officer rode in the driver's cab, and I sat in the back with two soldiers, who nursed their rifles between their knees, and smoked rank black cigarettes.

At Pithion, a very small frontier village, but with a large garrison, I was taken to the local police station and shut up in a cell for the night. The guards were polite but indifferent, and the cell, the floor of which was covered with musty straw, stank of urine, and was full of lice. By this time I had sufficiently recovered my spirits to be forming vague plans for escaping, though so far I had had no opportunity. There was still a large bump on the side of my head where the soldier had hit me with his truncheon.

Very early in the morning a young N.C.O. who spoke French as well as I did came to wake me up and tell me to get ready to march to the station, which was not more than a hundred yards from the jail. I had an escort of only two men, who led me straight to the goods yard, where there was a third-class coach standing by itself. We got in and, finding out from the N.C.O. that we had some time to wait, I asked if I could buy some cigarettes and food for the journey, for I had been given only a piece of maize bread.

He agreed, and sent the soldier off with some of my money, which he had with my identity card, compass, and a few other documents typed in Cyrillic script.

The coach was eventually shunted on to the back of a passenger train, but the N.C.O. told me that nobody would be allowed into our part of it.

The first day's journey, which was incredibly slow, took us as far as Plovdiv. I spent the day in making myself friendly with the N.C.O., with whom I discussed the war situation. He told me that it was certain that Bulgaria would be in the war against Britain before long. He said that this was not the wish of most of the people, but that the upper classes, and particularly the officers of the army, were absolutely pro-German. He was also convinced that the Germans would win easily and that the campaign against Russia would be over in a month. 'All the small Balkan countries will fight on the German side,' he said, 'so that they will be able to get something out of the peace conference. Each will be afraid that if they do not fight some of their territory will be given away to the others, like that of Jugoslavia and Greece.'

The N.C.O. told me that his father was a baker in Burgas, and that he himself had been trained for a job in Government service. He had been called up a year before the outbreak of war and, though he had now finished his military service, was retained because nearly the whole of the Bulgarian army was mobilized.

'Give the soldier some cigarettes,' he said. 'He is a peasant, called up, and he only gets twenty lei a month.'

I was interested to learn that a leu is about a halfpenny, or rather less.

'The Government provides food, uniform and boots,' said

the N.C.O., 'and the rest has to come from the soldier's family. Military service is very hard for a poor man. My pay, for instance, as a sergeant, is only seven hundred lei a month.'

At various stops on the journey the N.C.O. allowed me to buy food, which we all ate. But I managed each time to put the remainder away in my haversack. I also gave them a packet each of Bulgarian cigarettes, which were not strong and very palatable.

At Plovdiv we spent the night in a room in the goods yard. There was a stove, for which the soldier found wood, and, though it was a hot night, he insisted on stoking up until it was red hot. I simply sat with the perspiration streaming from my face, and the guards slept in turns.

From there next morning we again occupied entirely the last coach of a passenger train. This time it was a corridor coach, with half a dozen compartments with wooden seats. From the moment I boarded it I knew that, if I were going to escape, it would have to be that day.

My first thought was that I would be able to climb out of the lavatory window, but one of the guards always came with me. They did not allow me to lock the door and, as an additional precaution, leaned their heads out of the window of the corridor to see that I did not jump out. I would not have minded the risk of letting the soldier have a shot at me with his rifle, but the N.C.O. had a large Mauser and looked as if he might well know how to use it.

All day I kept up a conversation with the N.C.O. and plied him with a bottle of wine which I had bought at Plovdiv. Being stationed in Greece himself, he had willingly changed my Greek money for lei, at what I suspected to be a rate very favourable to himself. But as I had no hope of ever seeing any of it again I did not mind losing a little on the deal. This time we travelled faster, and it was about six o'clock in the evening when the sergeant told me that we were within twenty miles of Sofia. I knew that it was then or never, if I was to escape.

I waited a few minutes, and asked if I could go to the lavatory and fill my wine bottle with water. The N.C.O.

gave me permission, and rose to come with me. I walked along the corridor to the lavatory farthest from the end of the coach in which we had been sitting and where the soldier stayed, half-asleep. The N.C.O. followed me along. When I reached the lavatory I went in, closed the door, and filled the bottle with water. Then I looked out of the window. The N.C.O., who also had his head out of the window above the coach door, smiled and pointed out something in the countryside, for he was by this time not at all suspicious. The train was moving at about fifteen miles an hour.

Then I withdrew my head and quietly but swiftly opened the lavatory door. The N.C.O. was still leaning out of the window and the corridor was empty. Gripping the bottle of water by the neck I spoke to him quietly and, as he turned, I hit him on the side of the head as hard as I could. He fell down and lay on the floor, groaning slightly. I hit him again, and this time the bottle broke. He lay quite still.

I opened the door and leaped out on to the line, falling flat on my face. I was not hurt.

As soon as the train had gone out of sight I set off, running and walking alternately, away from the line, as far as I could tell due north. I had formed no plan, but I did not intend to go back over the two or three hundred miles to the Turkish frontier. As I ran and walked I decided to make in a northwesterly direction, back into Serbia, where I knew that the people were friendly.

This time I was a fugitive and very frightened. I could not, in Bulgaria, claim the protection, and the strange illegal legality, which an ordinary escaped prisoner of war enjoys, because I had used force in order to escape. I had no food. Like an idiot I had stuffed all that I had saved during the two days' journey into my haversack and I had left it behind.

All night I pressed on, guiding myself as best I could by the pole star. I was in a narrow and precipitous river valley, which sloped the way I was going. Below me I could hear the tumbling of a small torrent, and occasionally I disturbed a village dog, which barked loudly.

As dawn broke and the sun rose above the trees, I turned

my back to it, and started to climb a steep slope up the side of the valley. After a two-hour climb I crossed the watershed and went steeply down into another valley and across another stream very similar to the one which I had left. For about an hour at midday I hid in a field of maize and chewed the seeds off the cob to satisfy my hunger, and, finding myself, in the evening, passing by an orchard of plum trees, I filled my pockets with the fruit and ate it as I went.

The valleys were loud with a 'clack-clacking' noise which the women made with their primitive instruments for teasing flax, but I saw none of them except from very far off. Once a peasant, driving an ox-wagon laden with timber, passed slowly by, but I hid behind a tree and he did not see me. I noticed several small children minding their scanty flocks of sheep and goats.

The second night was a nightmare. I kept falling into trees beside the rough mountain tracks which I followed and putting my feet into holes which twisted my ankles. By daybreak I knew that I must rest. I found a field of maize and picked a handful of cobs. I walked into the middle of it and, after I had eaten, fell asleep.

When I awoke the sun was high. I was ravenously hungry and so stiff that I could hardly move. I ate some more corn and then crawled painfully to the edge of the field and looked out. Not far off was a little boy minding half a dozen pitiful sheep. Two miles away, on the other side of the valley, an ox-wagon was creeping up the side of the hill along a sand-yellow road. Somewhere in the valley a man was cutting wood, and his axe, muffled by the trees and the distance, rang dolefully and slowly, as though he were very old.

I was still hungry, and the sight of a bundle by the little shepherd's side gave me an idea. I crept out of the bushes and quietly reconnoitred to see if he had a dog. He was apparently quite alone.

Lying down on my stomach, I stalked that little boy as gently as if he had been a German sentry. When I was within ten yards of him, still unperceived, I rose to my feet, made a dash for his bundle, seized it, and, paying no attention to his cries, which were at first frightened and then indignant, made off at the best of my speed, which was not more than a fast shamble, because I was so stiff.

Although he was only a little boy, and although I guessed that he would not dare to leave his sheep either to chase me or to warn his friends, I put a good hour's walking between me and him before settling down to the contents of his bundle. It contained only a piece of dry maize bread, with one corner well gnawed, and some stale white cheese, very salt. But I was very glad of it and washed away the salty taste at a little mountain stream.

Gradually the stiffness wore off and I was again making as good a pace as the difficult country would allow. I calculated that with all the detours which I had had to make to avoid houses, and because I had crossed four valleys and was now climbing steadily up the side of the fifth, I could not have travelled on an average more than a mile and a half per hour in the direction in which I wanted to go.

Walking roughly westward I travelled about fifteen miles up a river valley and crossed the watershed, which gave me easier country because here it was open and bleak and very thinly populated. There were only a few scattered wooden houses. Then, after a day's walking downhill, I crossed a fairly large river by wading. The current was strong and nearly carried me away.

Shortly after I came to the railway, which was double-tracked, and I judged that it must be the main line between Sofia and Belgrade. That I crossed at night and immediately after came to the main road. I struck away from this road and continued westward over high and barren country for five days and nights, living always on maize and fruit, frightened often and always hungry. I thanked God for my Australian boots, which I had bought from a Jew in Salonika camp. They were scratched and cut by the sharp rocks, but so far showed no signs of falling to pieces, and the soles were still good.

At last the slopes began to face continually westward, and I knew that I must be in Serbia and approaching the Morava valley. Twenty-four hours later I came within sight of the river—a gleam of water many miles away. I still dared not speak to a soul, for I knew that the frontier between the countries had been pushed westward and that there was a good deal of mixed blood in those districts. I vowed that I would go on until the river was behind me.

In my slightly fevered mind the river had become the goal for which I was making. The western bank seemed to me a paradise of safety, where a man might give himself into the care of friends and sleep and sleep. When I reached it, just before dawn at the end of the next night, I did not pause to consider whether the current was fast or slow, or the river wide or narrow. I took off my boots and tied them by the laces round my neck and plunged in. It was about fifty yards wide at that point and not very fast. But my boots filled with water and made an intolerable weight that kept pulling my head under. For the second time in a week I nearly drowned.

When I reached the far bank—heaven only knows how long it took me—I crawled out and lay on my stomach. I remember vaguely being sick and vomiting streams of brownish water. I knew that I was finished and could not get up.

The next thing of which I have a clear memory is that I awoke in a large, low, whitewashed room, which might have been Zhivan's but was, in fact, far more prosperous, because in place of the plain wooden bed and homespun blankets there was an iron bedstead and sheets and an eiderdown. The other furniture consisted of another bed of similar design and a long wooden table with a bench alongside it. There was a 'grandfather's' wooden chair of rough design by the bedside.

A peasant woman was sitting at the far end of the room on a three-legged stool, spinning from a distaff. I felt stiff but rested, and ravenously hungry. For some time I lay without collecting my thoughts and not remembering where I was. Then it was borne in upon me that I must indeed be well inside Serbia and had fallen among friends.

I thought then that my luck was incredible, but later, when I had had experience of the Serbs' boundless hospitality, I knew that my treatment was only that which almost any fugitive, especially in times of occupation, can expect.

The woman did not at first see that I was awake, and I lay watching her face. As she sat with her head slightly bent, her profile was towards me. Her face was big-boned but very regular, with high cheekbones and a straight nose. She was dark and her eyes were deeply lined, though she must have been still young. She was dressed in heavy homespun clothing, more finely embroidered than I had seen in David Davidovitch's part of the world; the bodice was bright blue, and the embroidery on it was of black silk, which, as I saw when she turned towards me, exactly matched the colour of her eyes. Over her hair, which was brown, she wore a blue kerchief tied under her chin.

Presently she saw that I was awake and watching her. She smiled and, laying down her spinning, went out of the room. After a few minutes she returned, bringing a glass of milk with thick cream floating on the top, and a bowl of steaming bean soup, with a piece of light-brown wheaten bread, hot from the baking pan. She put it all on the chair by the bed and smiled encouragingly, but did not speak.

'Thank you,' I said, in Serbian, and 'ja sam ingles' (I am English).

'I know,' she replied, and she returned, rather self-consciously, to her spinning. When I had eaten and drunk the milk I fell asleep again.

For a day or two she and an older woman looked after me very gently. Conversation with them was difficult, partly because of our lack of a common language and partly because they were shy.

Then I awoke one morning to the sound of new voices. Four men were sitting on the bench near my bed and talking quietly. The eldest was a man of about fifty-five, short and stout, wearing a green uniform and a badge that I afterwards learned was that of a Government forester. The other three were more striking. The first was tall, with aquiline features and a beard. He had gaily coloured peasant's dress, with elaborate embroidery. Round his waist and over one shoulder he wore a bandolier full of rifle cartridges, and from his belt hung three Mills bombs. A rifle was slung over his back, and at his side was a revolver in a big black holster. A large knife in a brass sheath completed his armament. The other two were both wearing the dull grey uniform of N.C.O.s of the Jugoslav Army. They were less heavily, but as picturesquely, armed. All three were sunburned and looked none too clean. I sat up in bed, and said: 'Good morning.'

Speaking French, with a clipped accent and rather haltingly, one of the N.C.O.s said: 'Bonjour. You are English?'

'Yes.'

'Would you mind telling us how you came to our country?'

I explained, as briefly as I could. I told them that I could remember swimming the river, but could not understand anything further; I had woken up in the bed in which I now was, but could not recall how I had come there.

The N.C.O. first translated what I had said to the others, and then the man in the green uniform spoke for several minutes.

'That man', said the N.C.O., 'found you about half a mile from the river, lying by the side of the road. You were wet through and at first he thought you had been drowned. He held you upside down and a lot of water ran out. Then he put you on his wagon and brought you home. There he perceived that you were not dead and gave you some brandy. You revived and kept saying 'Ja sam ingles,' but he could not make out what else you said because you spoke in a language which he did not understand, but he thought it was French. He put you to bed and left his wife and daughter to look after you and came and fetched us. I am his son.'

I said that I was grateful to him and that he had probably saved my life. I asked who was the man with all the weapons.

'We three', said the N.C.O., 'are chetniki. We live in the hills and fight the Germans.'

He told me how, when the Germans had invaded the country, a man called Kosta Pechanats, who was leader of all the chetniks throughout the country, had retired into the hills and started to organize a guerrilla army. Kosta's headquarters was about thirty kilometres from where we were then, in a mountain called the Sokolovitsa. His companies had quickly grown, but so far had been unable to take any concerted action against the Germans because they had been engaged against bands of Albanians who, egged on by the Italians, had been making raids across the new Serbian border fixed by the Germans slightly north of Kosovska Mitrovitsa. Now, at last, they had been driven back.

'Now', he added naïvely, 'we intend to get arms and drive out the Germans.'

While he had been talking I had been thinking about my own intentions. I meant, if it were possible, to cross the country to where I had originally jumped out of the P.O.W. train, and see if I could find Ron Jones. I thought that these guerrillas might be the very men to help me.

'We have several Englishmen with us', continued the N.C.O., 'who, like you, jumped out of the train and escaped.'

I told him what I wanted to do and he translated it to his leader.

'A pity you were not here a week or two earlier,' he said. 'Kosta Pechanats has himself gone in that direction, where there is one of his generals, Novakovitch, who has a company on a mountain called Rudnik in Shumadija.'

While they were discussing how they might help me, I got out of bed and put on my trousers. I still felt rather weak at the knees, but capable of moving about.

Eventually the leader, through his interpreter, propounded a plan by which he would return to his headquarters and from there he would send some men to accompany me on the journey.

'It will be quite convenient,' he said, 'because we are sending messages to Kosta Pechanats nearly every other day, and they all have to be carried personally, by messenger. In two or three days' time two of my men will call for you here and will take you to Guberevats, where your comrade is.'

In the meantime, they said, I was to stay with the forester, who would look after me and give me whatever I asked for.

'Only remember,' added the N.C.O., 'you must not go outside or let anyone see you, because you are not far from Nish, which is a big town, and the main road is less than two kilometres away.'

Life for the two or three days during which I waited in the forester's house was very pleasant. He was called Atsa and he taught me a sort of two-handed beggar-my-neighbour which we played almost endlessly. He hated it whenever, by chance, I beat him, and was jovial when he won. We ate enormous meals, with chicken at each one, and drank quantities of good wine and *rakija.* Atsa also gave me a bag of finely cut yellow tobacco which, he said, he had grown himself. It made excellent cigarettes.

Gradually, and in spite of difficulties of language, I learned something, too, of his normal life and work. He was employed by the Government to conserve the Government forests, which the peasants were forbidden to cut without permission. I forget how many square kilometres of forest he had in his care, but it was a very large area, stretching from Nish out towards the Sokolovitsa. The salary was very small, but he told me quite frankly that he had augmented it by selling Government wood for his own profit, and by taking bribes from peasants whom he had found cutting it, until he had bought a valuable little holding for himself, and become one of the richest peasant proprietors in the district.

'All foresters are rich men after ten years,' he told me.

It was four days before my escort came to conduct me to Guberevats. There were three of them, tough-looking men, dressed in a mixture between a peasant's Sunday best and Jugoslav Army uniform, and armed to the teeth, with bandoliers of cartridges, revolvers, rifles, bombs, and bayonets.

The leader was a sergeant called Nikchitch, an unpleasant, bloodthirsty man, who was in the habit of drawing his bayonet and showing some brown stains near the handle. 'That is German blood,' he would say. Then he would point to a large stain on his clothing. 'That is where I stabbed an Albanian. You should have heard him squeal. Like a pig.'

Moisilovitch, another sergeant, who had been in the Royal Cavalry Guard, sported a pair of elegant riding boots, which he always kept highly polished. He had sleek black hair and a long shiny black moustache, as highly polished as his boots. He said very little. Joshitch, the third, was a young corporal of the regular infantry. He was self-opinionated and noisy, but always deferred to both Nikchitch and Moisilovitch.

Atsa gave us a very good meal before we set out. The journey took us through many villages, across wild but friendly mountains—very different from those which I had crossed in Bulgaria. There were more trees, and the vegetation seemed greener. I noticed that every scrap of ground which could possibly be brought under cultivation—even steep mountain slopes which could only have had a bare covering of poor soil—was producing spindly maize or sometimes oats or barley.

Village noises scarcely vary the world over. They are subdued and friendly in the warm sun; children shouting, the crunch of a wagon on an unmetalled road, and a cock crowing; the buzz of bees and a bird singing somewhere in a thornbush. All these things were strongly nostalgic.

Everywhere the peasants were demonstratively friendly, and they gave us meals and wine almost without our asking for them. The chetniks went very slowly, making the most of the hospitality of every village. My only quarrel with them, and this I could not explain to them, was that they would never stop for sleep for more than an hour or two at a time, and that mostly in the daytime. If they stopped for the night it was only at a place at which they had arrived long after dark, and they would leave it an hour before dawn. This meant that our greatest distances were covered at night, when the going over the rough roads was far more difficult and tiring. The whole way I could not see that they

took any precaution against discovery, and they never tried to keep their identity secret.

In a village called Vitanovats, where we crossed the Western Morava, near Kraljevo, I saw my first example of their rough chetnik discipline. As I understood almost nothing of their conversation, unless it was directed at me and accompanied by the most violent sign-language, I was quite unprepared for what happened.

As we entered a long, rough road which served as the main village street, Nikchitch pulled out his revolver and fired off several shots into the air. I noticed that the demeanour of all three of my companions had changed from friendliness to one of fierce determination. Outside a poorish-looking house Nikchitch stopped and shouted something at the top of his voice. A peasant woman came out, looking very frightened, and carrying in her hand some currency notes, which she offered to Nikchitch. He waved them away and shouted at her. She returned hesitantly into the house and called her husband. He was a weak-looking man, both physically and in character, and was white with fear. The woman began to weep noisily, and I noticed that all three chetniks had their revolvers in their hands as they closed in on the man.

By this time a small knot of peasants had gathered around the spot, but none of them made any comment or move to interfere. The woman pressed forward again, and offered the money to Nikchitch, who spat on it. Moisilovitch took it quietly from her hand, lit a match, and set light to it.

Nikchitch turned to the group of onlookers, and, holding the peasant by the scruff of the neck and giving him an occasional shake, as though he were a rat, he made a short but violent speech. Then he took from my hand a stout hazel staff which I had been using as a walking stick. It was about an inch and a half thick.

They made their victim lie down, and Nikchitch set about him with the stick. He hit him on the rump, and the back of the legs, and in the small of the back, and when he put his hand in the way to protect himself he received a crack on it which must have broken his fingers. I have never before or since seen a man get such a hiding, except at the hands of the Gestapo.

After some time Moisilovitch, who had been counting the strokes aloud, said 'Enough.' Nikchitch reluctantly gave me back the stick and we turned and marched off. In that village we spoke to nobody else and nobody made any move, either of friendship or hostility.

When we had gone a little way I asked why they had beaten the man. Joshitch explained that there had been a man in the village, a Serbian, who had escaped from a German prisoner-of-war camp in the north of the country and had made his way home. The other man, who had been beaten, was his enemy and had gone into Kraljevo and given the Germans information against him, and he had been recaptured and taken off to Germany. The Germans had paid 200 dinars—less than a pound at the pre-war rate of exchange—to the informer. The notes were those which Moisilovitch had burned. They had punished him by the only method of which they were capable.

'He should have been shot really,' said Moisilovitch, 'but it is difficult to shoot one's own countryman when one does not know the full rights and wrongs of the case.'

Riding up the mountain path which led to Guberevats, where I hoped I should find Ron Jones, I had a sudden longing to hear my own language spoken in a friendly voice.

David Davidovitch was out in the fields, but his two daughters and his wife appeared overjoyed to see me back.

'We were sure that you had been killed or captured,' they said, when I had told them as much of the story as I could convey in signs and with the few words of Serbian which I had so far learned.

I asked for Ron Jones, and they told me that he had left shortly after I did, and that David had taken him through Kraljevo as he had taken me. Since then they had heard nothing of him. I was bitterly disappointed.

When David came in from the fields I asked him if I could stay there for a short while, until I decided what I should do.

'This is your home until the war ends and you can go to England,' he replied.

On this occasion I stayed with David for ten days and went with him into the fields to watch him at work. Though it was only the beginning of September, the harvest was in and the threshing was almost finished. There remained only the maize to be brought in, and much of that was already cut. The grapes were just beginning to get ripe (though David's were not good, he told me—the best wine-growing districts in that part of the country were farther south). The plums had been gathered and put into barrels to ferment ready for distilling.

From this short stay with David I learned some of the ways of life of the Serbian peasant, and of the organization of the communities in which he lives. It is as much that organization as the wildness of the country which prevents it from being subdued by an invader and makes wide scale guerrilla operations possible.

Eighty per cent of the population of Jugoslavia is peasant and far more than that is of peasant origin within the last two generations. For the most part the land is divided into very small holdings, and the only large landholders were the Serbian Orthodox Church and the Crown, which owned mostly woodland. It is the custom that the patrimony be divided when a father dies, and only half is left to the eldest son. The rest is divided into equal parts and distributed among the younger sons. The result of this is that the holdings tend to grow smaller with the years, rather than larger. In some of the mountainous parts of Bosnia and Tsrna Gora (Montenegro), and even in Serbia itself, there are peasants who maintain themselves and their families almost entirely on a couple of acres of poor mountainous land and what rough grazing they can find for their sheep and cattle. These unfortunates live in the direst poverty, in shacks thatched with maize stalks. Their families, beasts, and poultry live in the one room with them. They have not even a bed.

David Davidovitch was typical of the wealthier class of peasant. He was, in fact, a younger son, and had inherited only the smaller part of the patrimony. But his eldest brother Dushan was a notorious drinker and ne'er-do-well, and had sold several of his fields back to David and the second son, Eli. The youngest of the four brothers, Jakob, lived with David.

David's household was typical. It consisted of himself and his wife, and Jakob and his wife. David had no children, but Jakob had three daughters and a son aged about eleven, who was the apple of David's eye and would probably inherit the whole of his property, which, for a peasant, was considerable.

When a peasant can afford more than the one basic two-roomed house in which the majority live, he does not build a larger one, he merely builds another of the same size; and when he can afford it, or his family increases to such a size as to be unbearable, he builds yet another. Thus David had three—two of lath and plaster, with tiled roofs, and one of wood. The oldest of the three houses was roughly divided into two parts by a plaster wall. In one half was the open fireplace over which the women did all the cooking. A wood fire was kept almost continually burning there, and a pile of ashes had accumulated. The other half of the house was the eating-room, and Jakob's two daughters slept in a bed at one end of it.

The two brothers and their wives slept in the wooden house, in winter inside, and in the summer on a rough balcony in front. I never succeeded in finding out exactly where the little boy slept.

The furniture was very roughly constructed, and I suspect that most of it was made by Jakob, who was a competent carpenter.

The third house was better-built. It had one large and two smaller rooms, one of which was beautifully hung with rugs in the Turkish style. In the large room, which was used

for entertaining guests, there was merely a long table, with benches either side. The floors of this third house were of wood. The other two had beaten earthen floors, as is customary in peasant houses in Jugoslavia.

Jakob's furniture was better made than that in most peasant houses. There were simple wooden chairs, without any pretence to luxury, and the beds consisted of shallow wooden boxes, supported on four legs. For himself, David merely filled the boxes with straw, which served as a mattress, but in the guest house there were two feather mattresses.

There was no oven. The bread was baked in a shallow earthenware dish with a heavy lid, which was pushed under the ashes. David's wife made excellent bread in this fashion. The other food was either roast on a spit, or boiled or fried over the fire.

The womenfolk looked after the dairy, which was, as usual, in a wooden shed apart from the houses. There they made cheese and a kind of thick, salted Devonshire cream, which used to keep throughout the winter, though after a few months it became hard and less appetizing.

Within the fence which surrounded the farmyard were also the sheds for the animals, which consisted of a pen with a rough shelter for the sheep, a good cowshed, and a tumble-down pigsty. David had more agricultural machinery than most peasants (he had a steel plough, which is unusual in Serbia), and he kept it under an open-sided barn, where also a few scraggy hens roosted.

The pride of his stock was a pair of magnificent oxen, which he used for all draught purposes, including ploughing. He also had two or three milch cows and several heifers. His flock of sheep numbered about thirty, and there were two or three pigs. The total holding was about twenty-five hectares, including nearly an acre of timber, an orchard of plum-trees covering an acre and a half, and half an acre of vine. On this David and his brother and their wives and children lived so comfortably that they were the richest and most influential family in the large village of Guberevats, with the exception of their brother Eli, who was the *pretsednik,* or mayor.

All the clothes which David wore came from his own sheep and his own little plantation of flax. Both wool and flax were teased on primitive instruments by his womenfolk, spun from a distaff and woven on a hand-loom which was kept in the living-room. They used to bleach the linen by spreading it on the grass in the sun and continually sprinkling it with water.

David ate mostly wheaten bread, but he was one of the more fortunate. The staple food in that part of Serbia is bread made from the flour of maize. The Serbs eat a lot of bread and the ration for the Army is one kilogram per head per day. David's wife used to keep an earthenware pot of beans continually boiling in the ashes of the fire, and this was renewed daily, so that the stock became thick and appetizing.

The women were never idle. They took almost entire charge of the milch cattle, the sheep and the poultry, and were responsible for the dairy. They did all the cooking and cleaning. They washed and mended the clothes, as well as doing all the weaving and spinning, and making all the blankets and mats on the hand-loom. David bought nothing except an occasional kerchief for his wife, his sister-in-law and her daughters, and his shoes, which were *opanke,* or leather sandals, curled up at the toes. He occasionally, also, bought some tobacco, for his land was not suitable for growing it.

The distaff is almost the symbol of Serbian womanhood. Whenever they have nothing to do with their hands—even when they are minding the sheep or going to market—they spin. They spin at their meals and they spin while they watch the dinner cook. It is only by this incredible industry that they manage to produce a sufficient length of yarn for the cloth of the whole household.

And yet, for all their industry, Serbian women play a very humble role in the house. They do not sit with the men at meals, and speak only when they are spoken to. They have no voice in the government of the household, and defer

absolutely on all matters to the opinions of their husbands. Even a mother defers to her son, when he becomes head of the household.

I was talking to a peasant in his house one day, when one of his daughters, in conversation with her mother at the other end of the room, gave a subdued laugh. The peasant was furiously angry.

'Don't you hear that men are talking?' he shouted. 'When men are talking in this house, I don't want to hear a woman's voice.' Both his wife and his daughter heeded his rebuke and remained silent as long as I was there.

Labour in Jugoslavia before the war was dirt cheap: you could have a farm worker for less than a shilling a day, and even a skilled worker in a factory commanded only about two or three pounds a month. Thus it was that anyone who had no property at all, and no education, was very poor indeed, and it was among this class that communism spread easily. Yet it was a fact that nobody actually starved. You could live on a shilling a day. If you were moderately well-off life was pleasant, and if you were rich you lived like a prince, ran a car, and kept many servants.

Education was free and nominally compulsory; but in fact it was difficult to compel peasants living in remote mountain villages to send their children several miles every day to school, and many of them did not, with the result that there is still a very high proportion of illiteracy. David Davidovitch, though a rich and in many ways an enlightened man, could not sign his own name, and Jakob's children had gone no further than the most elementary school. Nevertheless, I came across many young peasants who had stayed at school until they were eighteen, and who spoke French and German and, sometimes, though this was rare, a few words of English. Many of the more enlightened peasants provided thus for the livelihood of their younger sons by sending them into the Army, or Government service, or even keeping them at University until they were qualified as doctors or in some other profession.

The village of Guberevats, in which David lived, was spreadeagled over two or three kilometres square of hillside. It was, on the whole, prosperous. There was a tailor and a little general shop and two cafés, where one could sit and drink glasses of *rakija* and, sometimes, buy a meal. One of the peasants had a threshing machine, which he hired all round the village, and another would shave you if you were too lazy to shave yourself. His razors were very blunt and he was apt to moisten the brush by spitting on it.

The centre of the village life was the *obshtina,* or village hall, in which the village clerk, a Government official grossly underpaid, did the work of the Clerk to the Rural District Council in England. Every year the villagers met in the *obshtina* to elect the *pretsednik,* or mayor, who in turn received his administrative orders from the chief of police at the centre of the district.

Thus the independence of these village communities and of each family within them made guerrilla organization easy. Not only could each family usually give up one or two members as active guerrillas, but they could also supply them with the necessities of life. It was as easy for guerrillas—their political flavour was not important so long as they had rifles—to requisition food as it was for the Germans; in many cases it was easier, for the guerrillas, knowing the country, knew how much they could expect from each village, whereas the Germans did not.

In such a village as Guberevats, a fugitive could hide for years and be kept by the peasants, especially if he were under the protection of an influential man like David Davidovitch. A messenger could stay there for the night, and pass on without the knowledge of anyone but the man who had sheltered him. A whole company of guerrillas could descend and billet themselves there, and live there for a month, and the village could still support itself in spite of fifty extra mouths and fifty pairs of idle hands.

## V

While I was waiting with David Davidovitch for Kosta Pechanats to arrive in Guberevats, as I had been assured he would before long, I found out as much as I could about his guerrilla organization, and other rival bodies.

There were at that time only two distinct forces—chetniks and communists—but each of these was divided into a number of groups. The largest, and in Shumadija the most popular group, was the chetnik organization led by Kosta Pechanats. This group sprang from the ancient Serbian tradition of *komite,* or independent guerrilla bands who carried on warfare against the Turks during their five hundred years' occupation of the country. These were the heroes who are commemorated in the rich epic verse of the language. The first Serbian king, Karageorge, was one of their leaders.

During the Austrian and Bulgarian occupation of the 1914–18 war the tradition had been continued under a number of leaders, whose names, with the title *vojvoda,* which means merely 'leader', have also become household words among the peasantry. Shumadija, which is the rich district in the heart of old Serbia in which David lived and I operated for several months as a guerrilla, had the strongest chetnik tradition.

Kosta Pechanats was one of those leaders who attained fame during the 1914–18 war. He landed behind the Balkan front in 1917 in a plane and raised a rebellion against the Bulgars in the districts around Krushevats, Nish, and in the valley of the Southern Morava. This rebellion came to nothing and was paid for in a brutal toll of villages burned and peasants hanged and shot.

When the war ended the organization was 'legalized' by King Alexander I, and continued on a peacetime basis. The chetniks were allowed to keep their arms and became consequently an unofficial police force. As they had companies in many villages throughout the country, they were in fact a very potent factor in the Jugoslav political scene.

Their leader until about 1930 was *Vojvoda* Lune, a man of liberal ideals, who had been the greatest of the chetniks during the war years, and who was greatly loved by the people. In the early 1930's *Vojvoda* Lune was assassinated and, though nobody was officially indicted for the crime, Kosta Pechanats was generally suspected as having had a hand in the assassination. It is possible that this was part of the same fascist plot which led to the death of King Alexander and other democratic leaders.

Kosta Pechanats succeeded to the leadership of the chetniks and from that time their political activity became even more marked. Kosta's politics were right-wing republican, and his chetniks became the greatest enemies of the communists, whom they persecuted with great vigour. They were, in fact, almost entirely successful in keeping communism confined to towns and industrial areas.

When the Germans, in 1941, overran the country, Kosta assumed command of every guerrilla band which had its origin in the peacetime chetnik organization, and he appointed a great number of local *vojvode*. These men were usually chosen, not for any military ability, but because they were respected in their community and sometimes even because they could afford to pay for the honour.

To this organization was attracted nearly every man who wished to become a guerrilla but who was not a communist; and the strength of the companies grew daily all through the summer of 1941. Two army officers, however, Brigadier-General Ljubo Novakovitch and a colonel of the general staff called Drazha Mihailovitch, formed organizations of their own, nominally owing allegiance to Kosta, but in fact apart from him. They both held aloof because they recognized the political and military weaknesses of the chetniks, and partly, no doubt, because each had an eye on the possibility of his succeeding to Pechanats's position.

Meanwhile, the entry of Russia into the war had given an extra impetus to the communists. Their underground organization was excellent, for it had never been anything but illegal. They had, moreover, the additional advantage of being able to continue work in the large towns from their peacetime 'cells', whereas the chetniks had operated only in the villages. The chetnik leaders, having openly in peacetime been known for their membership of the organization, were all known by name to the Germans, whereas the communists, coming now from hiding, or from their jobs as schoolmasters, engineers, or labourers, were still unknown, as were most of their supporters.

From the first there was open warfare between the communists and the chetniks, because the communists not only distrusted Kosta Pechanats, and quite rightly; they also hated the very name of his organization, which had been the cause of the imprisonment of so many of their fellows before the war. Their hand was, in fact, against every man, especially in the early days, for the villagers were one hundred per cent loyal to the King, and the communists made the mistake from the first of disavowing the King and all he stood for. In Shumadija, the communists also made themselves disliked in the villages by their high-handed methods of collecting food for their companies, and because their first actions were mostly ones of sabotage against the administration, and consisted of burning down village *obshtine*.

Both Novakovitch, whose companies were spread over two mountains, the Bukulja and the Rudnik, and Mihailovitch, who held the district around Ravna Gora, were at first willing to work with the communists in operations against the Germans, though standing aloof from them politically.

Kosta Pechanats and his staff of *vojvode* arrived in Guberevats in the middle of the third week in September, on their way from the Bukuja, where they had been in conference with General Novakovitch. They arrived late at night, and slept in the *pretsednik's* house, which was at the far end of the village from David's. David and I went to meet them early the next morning.

As we approached the house a number of shaggy ponies were being caught and saddled by men, some of whom had beards, and all of whom were dressed in peasant clothing, with bandoliers and woolly *shubara* hats. The *shubara* is the traditional chetnik headgear, and is a conical, heavy affair, made of astrakhan, which can be pushed into the shape of a busby. Outside the house a long trestle table had been luxuriously prepared, and some of the village women were waiting to serve breakfast. The *vojvode,* armed to the teeth, were lounging about waiting for Kosta to appear so that the meal could begin.

My first impression of Kosta Pechanats was of a tall, ageing man, with a commanding presence. A slight stoop took away some of his height, and he wore a greying beard and heavy *shubara.* His officers greeted him deferentially, and he took his place at the head of the table. David and I did not approach. We stood at a respectful distance among the villagers, where we remained until the meal was finished. I noticed that, though there was little politeness of conversation among the *vojvode* (everybody shouted at everybody else) the greatest deference was paid to Kosta. I supposed that that meal in the open air, with the 'heroes' sitting at the table and the villagers standing respectfully around while their wives served the food, was in the ancient Serbian chetnik tradition.

When the meal was almost over I allowed David to go forward and inform the great man that I was there. Kosta immediately beckoned me in the friendliest manner. One of his captains, speaking very broken English, acted as interpreter. Kosta greeted me with a kiss, under which I did my best not to flinch. He told me that, though he had helped a number of Englishmen in the past, and had several permanently with him at his headquarters 'in the woods', he could not on this occasion take me with him, but would give me the same three guides who had brought me to Guberevats to take me to the headquarters of General Novakovitch, about forty kilometres to the north. He described the general as 'a great patriot'. He also signed, with a huge

rubber stamp, a little printed pass which enrolled me formally as one of his chetniks. He closed the interview by kissing me again.

I went with David to collect my scanty baggage, which consisted of a spare shirt and my compass, and received from him the gift of 200 dinars. Then, accompanied by Joshitch, Nikchitch and Moisilovitch, I again set out on my travels. On none of these early journeys as a chetnik did I ever see a German, which was a good thing, because the chetniks always wore their full regalia, including the 'death's head' badge, and were bristling with arms. We avoided all roads which were passable for motor transport, and never went into any town.

On this journey I would have wished to pass incognito, but Nikchitch was always careful to tell all the villagers who I was, and the attention so aroused was often embarrassing, for half the village would congregate to meet me.

The most enthusiastic and friendly of the peasants were the older men who had served on the Balkan front. They would crowd around and shake me by the hand, and reminisce about the wonderful treatment which they had received at the hands of the English soldiers. The rations which they had eaten were among the most vivid of their memories, and, in their reminiscences, seemed to have consisted mainly of marmalade and chocolate.

I was continually amazed by the reputation which the Scottish nursing units had made for themselves. The peasants talked of our sisters almost as demigoddesses, recalling how they had driven ambulances and performed miracles of endurance and mercy. All over the country their presence was remembered. There was a legend, which I heard in more than one village, of how one of them, at a pinch, had commanded a battery of artillery. In spite of my strenuous protests that this was impossible, I could never shake the belief of any of the peasants who told me the story. Once, in Brus, I found concrete evidence of them. In the schoolroom was a little library of English books, stamped 'Gift of the Scottish Red Cross Society'. They were those red-backed Nelson cheap editions which we all remember in our mothers' libraries, with titles such as *The Adventures of Pamela*. There were also some copies of *Blackwood's Magazine*. I imagine that they are still there.

My most vivid memory of this journey was a view of the town of Gornje Milanovats, from the top of the Rudnik. I had an impression of a little group of shining white buildings nestling in a dark green valley, and behind them the sinister heights of the Ravna Gora. Milanovats looked a happy little town in the morning sun, and I longed to walk in its streets. Later I did so and found it in ashes.

In the heart of the Rudnik there is a small monastery called Blagovestenje, and it was there that we found Ljubo Novakovitch, with his headquarters company. He too was a tall man, with greying hair and an air of worried preoccupation. But he greeted me kindly. It was exceedingly unfortunate that in all our relations we never properly understood each other, for in his Company there was no man who spoke either French or English, except a little courier called Atsa, whose French was about equal to my Serbian.

I gathered, however, that the upshot of the conference of the chetnik leaders, which had taken place at Novakovitch's previous headquarters on the Bukulja, had been that Novakovitch, for reasons which were not at first explained to me, had finally severed his connection with Kosta Pechanats. He had started an effort to establish his own claim as leader of all guerrilla forces in the country. His own men regarded him as such, and he commanded the loyalty of a number of officers who had previously been Kosta's *vojvode*. One such leader, a young peasant who had been an N.C.O. in the Jugoslav Army, was camped with his company of about forty men in the woods close to the monastery.

The monastery was not rich, but it supported six monks, the chief of whom was a picturesque old man with a white beard. I met a number of Serbian Orthodox monks while I was there, and found them broadminded and well-educated men. Their order was not narrow, and they seemed to be allowed to do almost anything they pleased except marry. When they went abroad they wore natty lounge suits, and

the beards of the youngest were smartly trimmed. They were proud of the tradition of patriotism which had accumulated over many centuries around their name.

During the Turkish occupation the Serbian monasteries kept alive the language and the national integrity. The monks were the only literate section of the population at that time. They succoured the heroes who handed on the chetnik tradition from father to son; they wrote and copied the epic verse which is the language's only ancient literature; in them the spirit of the country persisted through five hundred years of oppression which might easily have killed it.

In this newest danger their role was clear to them. They regarded it as their duty to offer every aid to anyone who was willing to fight the invader. Everywhere they offered succour, sometimes to the communists, sometimes to the chetniks, and always to fugitives from German 'justice'.

I found Novakovitch's headquarters seething with activity. Couriers came and went from every part of the surrounding districts. I reflected that it must have been like making war in the Middle Ages, for the fastest method of carrying dispatches at Novakovitch's disposal was by horseman. Two or three days after I arrived, news came that one of these messengers had been shot and killed by the communists. Novakovitch was plunged into the depths of depression.

'How shall we ever drive out the Germans,' he asked, 'when we are so disunited? Everyone is against us—the Germans, the Government under Neditch, who is trying to form an army to fight against us, and now the communists.'

Novakovitch had been working hard to gain the communists' confidence, and it was typical of Serbian politics at that time that, within a week of the killing of the courier, one of their leaders arrived to confer with him. He brought a small Partisan company with him.

These men bore the evidence of having been very recently in action. They were armed largely with German weapons, and some of them wore pieces of German uniform and German field boots. They were tough and sullen, and held themselves aloof. That day the monastery was swarming with men, who piled their arms in the open and stood about in the courtyard within the monastery walls. That day, also, I was given a lesson in tact.

Nikchitch was acting as a sort of R.S.M.

'What do you think of Serbian soldiers?' he asked me.

'I think they have very little discipline and are not well trained,' I replied, more forcibly than I intended, because it was difficult to make myself understood.

'Why do you say that?' asked a Partisan leader who had overheard.

'Because they take no kind of precaution against being seen from the air,' I replied; 'they leave their arms in the open and stand about as though they were at a fair.'

'Perhaps you are right,' said the Partisan leader, and he went away and made his men move under the trees and take their arms with them. Nikchitch watched them scornfully.

'Only the Partisans are afraid of a bomb or two,' he said, and strutted off to listen to a man who was singing a doleful ballad and accompanying himself on the *gusle*.

The *gusle* is a string instrument with a single string made of horsehair. Its tune is low and in a minor key, and it has a very small range. The *guslari* were the old wandering musicians who, in the time of the Turkish occupation, made their living as they moved from village to village by singing ballads about the days when Serbia was great, and about heroes like Kraljevitch Marko. The first time I heard a man playing the *gusle* and singing, I thought that somebody had been badly hurt and was moaning in pain. But, in its right surroundings, it has a charm which all quaint things have.

Hardly had Nikchitch wandered off, when a Ju 88 came roaring up the valley. It made a wide sweep over the monastery and flew off in the direction of Kraljevo.

The Partisans went away towards evening and General Novakovitch was in high spirits. Moving among the men of his company, I learned that a large-scale attack on several German garrisons was about to begin. The General explained to me that he had completed an agreement with

the Partisans, and also with Colonel Drazha Mihailovitch, who controlled nearly a division of guerrillas from the Ravna Gora, the mountain which I had seen on my way to the monastery. He said that Mihailovitch, for his part, had also completed a similar agreement with the Partisans.

The garrisons which were to be attacked in the first assault included Chachak, Uzhitsa, Kraljevo, Krushevats, Kragujevats and Gornje Milanovats. Novakovitch himself was to lead an attack on Arandjelovats, a small industrial town to the north of the Rudnik, which was important because of a factory for making explosives.

While we were discussing the news, and excitement ran high, there was a sudden roar of aeroplane engines overhead, and I looked up to see three Do 17's circling the monastery. I made a dive for cover and almost immediately the bombs began to fall. The first two fell on the chapel, and the rest were wide. Two of them made craters in the road outside the monastery gates.

Meanwhile, everyone had started to make preparations for war. The Father Superior of the monastery, seeing that I had no weapons, beckoned me into his study. There he locked the door, and removed a panel from above the mantelshelf. Inside were four brand-new rifles, of Czechoslovakian make and some boxes of ammunition.

'Don't tell anyone where you found this,' he said, handing me one of the rifles. 'I shall only give you fifty rounds of ammunition, because you will not be able to carry more. If anyone asks you how many rounds you have, say twenty.'

I took the rifle and promised to take great care of it. I should have liked to ask the old monk where he had got it, and how long it had been there, but I guessed that it would not have been tactful. That night, too, General Novakovitch gave me a complete set of peasant clothing, instead of my khaki drill slacks and white sweater, which by that time were very much the worse for wear.

On the 29th of September 1941 we set out for the Bukulja, where we were to rendezvous with other companies which had brought themselves under Novakovitch's command. We were in high spirits, for news had arrived that the Partisans had already taken Uzhitza, and Drazha Mihailovitch was attacking Chachak with a force of several thousand men.

The attack on Arandjelovats never took place. We arrived at the rendezvous after an eighteen-hour march to find that very few of the chetnik companies who were supposed to have provided us with nearly four hundred armed men, had kept the appointment. There were thousands of unarmed peasants, carrying picks and axes, and who were willing enough to pit themselves against any odds, but the core of our attacking force was missing.

It was the fault of Kosta Pechanats. Kosta had always been half Fascist, and when Russia entered the war and the Partisan companies grew rapidly and began to take action against the Germans, he became convinced that they at last might be too strong for him alone. He therefore called a conference of his *vojvode* on the Bukulja and announced his intention of co-operating with the Germans, who had already made overtures to him. He called on the *vojvode* to withdraw their men from the hills and villages and to take them into the towns, where they would be clothed, fed, and armed, under German tutelage, by the quisling Serbian Government. They would also receive pay. Many must have been attracted by the prospect of pay—an unheard-of thing among chetniks. But by far the greater number of defections from the true cause was due to their loyalty to the persons of their leaders. This quality the Serbs possess to a fault. It is that, and personal ambition, which cause the majority of the complications in Serbian politics, and which rent the country into a kaleidoscopic pattern in the early days of the occupation.

It was when Kosta had announced this decision that Novakovitch began his bid for leadership of all the chetnik organizations. But he had underrated the very real hold which Kosta had over his men, and the attraction afforded by a life of comfort and the promise of 2,000 dinars a month, which was more money than a junior officer received in peacetime.

It must have taken very great strength of mind for Novakovitch, outside Arandjelovats, to follow the policy he did. The peasants who had answered his call would have followed him blindly against any odds. He knew that if he failed to attack immediately he would lose their allegiance for ever, even though he knew that the attack must fail. He knew too that, without the support of the surrounding villages, the country would be too hot to hold him.

He therefore called his headquarters company and made them a short speech. From them he selected twenty of the best men, and made them another speech, and, as soon as it was dark, he set off southward across the Rudnik.

Before he moved off he had the courage also to address the thousands of peasants whom he disbanded. I do not know what he said to them except that it was brief and that there were tears in his eyes. But I am convinced that no eloquence could drive from their hearts the belief that they had been betrayed by him; certainly he did not succeed in driving its reflection from their faces.

We marched south-east for five days, having no more contact with the local population than was strictly necessary, and travelling chiefly at night. Shortly after dawn each day we would lie up under the cover of trees and Novakovitch would send a patrol into the nearest village for supplies. He always paid for what he demanded and seemed to have as much money as was necessary. I learned later that he had escaped capture by the Germans with the whole of the funds of his brigade. (A Jugoslav brigade in the pre-war army consisted of nine battalions.)

For me, this period was one of the most trying. At that time I imperfectly understood the reasons for which we were moving. I had no idea of where we were going, and what we might expect when we arrived. But the most galling thing of all was that there was no way of expressing disapproval, except by behaving in the most picturesque and violent manner, which always left me with a sense of the ridiculous, and made the Serbs laugh. They would not take me seriously, and insisted on treating me as a sort of mascot. As it was almost impossible to express even the least important wish, they assumed that I had none. The whole march, which was trying enough, and demanded a great physical effort, for me lost its point. Above all I could not understand the secrecy in which our movements were shrouded, for whenever I was able to make contact with the peasants they were as friendly as they had ever been.

At last we came within the sound of a battle, but it took me nearly twelve hours of questioning and perseverance before I discovered from the chetniks what it was. They told me that we had arrived within a few miles of Krushevats, which, as part of the general's plan of revolt, was being attacked. A similar thing had happened there, however, as had happened at Arandjelovats, and more than half of the expected chetnik force had not arrived for the attack. They had mustered only two chetnik companies, a large company of Partisans, and the usual huge force of semi-armed peasants, and with this inadequate strength had attacked the town with preliminary success. When I asked who was commanding the attack, I was told a Lieutenant-Colonel Radevitch, *vojvoda* of the chetnik company Stalatch (a town to the north-east of Krushevats).

We halted for a whole day within (as far as I could judge) ten miles of the firing. It seemed to me that the weapons were mostly small arms, with plenty of L.M.G.s and mortars mixed in.

Towards night the firing died down, and in the small hours of the morning Moisilovitch woke me and told me that the General would be glad if I would attend a conference. This was the first time that any invitation of this kind had been offered me, and I accepted with alacrity. In a candle-lit room in a peasant's house I was introduced to the leaders of the attacking forces.

The scene was impressive. In a bare, whitewashed room Novakovitch was seated at the head of a long table. A candle stuck in the mouth of a bottle shed a flickering light on his face, throwing his cheekbones into relief and accentuating

the hollows round his mouth. On his right sat Lieutenant-Colonel Misha Radevitch, a stocky, fair man, with a very square jaw and a thin, determined mouth. Next to Radevitch sat Stanimir Radenkovitch, his adjutant, a young man, also very fair, with a deep, booming voice. On Novakovitch's left sat two of the most picturesque men whom I have ever seen. The leader was a big man, made to appear even bigger by his enormous *shubara* hat with a long tassel hanging on one side. He had prominent, sharp features, and eyes set too close together. He was wearing a full bandolier and carried a short but wicked-looking carbine. The second was very like a smaller edition of him, and echoed his every opinion with an air of such fierce determination that I half-expected him to challenge anyone who disagreed to a duel. These men were introduced to me as Major Keserovitch, *vojvoda* of the chetnik company of Rasina, and his adjutant, Lieutenant Popovitch.

'I think what the General has said is very sound,' Keserovitch would say, with great force.

'Very sound, indeed, Gospodine Majore,' Popovitch would echo, glaring at everybody in turn, and at me longest of all, as though he were challenging me to deny it. These two certainly presented a united front.

The Partisan leader among these was an unimpressive figure. He was an ex-schoolmaster called Zakitch, a little man with a cast in one eye, so that you could never be quite sure where he was looking. He was dressed in a green peasant's jacket and was apparently unarmed. His chief of staff was called laconically Marko. He sat the whole time in absolute silence, watching everybody with his sharp black eyes. He had drooping moustaches, and was dressed in ordinary civilian clothes with riding-breeches.

Stanimir, Radevitch's adjutant, to whom I took an immediate liking, solved my language difficulty by talking workmanlike French. From him I learned that the battle had so far gone badly. The three companies between them had attacked the town on the same night which had been fixed for our attack on Arandjelovats. They had penetrated to the centre, but after two days of round-the-houses fighting, with very few casualties on either side, they had been driven out, and their ammunition had begun to fail. The arms situation had been relieved on the third day by a wily action devised by Zakitch, in which the Partisans had ambushed a Germany infantry company, inflicted heavy casualties, and captured two L.M.G.s and a number of rifles.

The firing we had heard as we approached was a second assault on the town, which had failed when the Germans had called upon tanks from Nish and a flight of Stukas.

Between them the three companies had nearly four hundred armed men, compared with a German garrison of about three hundred, not all of them fighting soldiers, which had now been reinforced by a detachment of half a dozen light tanks. More than a thousand peasants had assembled to help the chetniks and Partisans, but, as it was impossible to arm and feed them, after they had dug a number of road-blocks they had been disbanded.

News had leaked through that the attacks in other parts of the country had been successful. Uzshitsa, with its small-arms factory, was firm in Partisan hands, and Drazha Mihailovitch, with Partisan aid, had captured Chachak and taken nearly a hundred prisoners, several pieces of artillery, and three light tanks. Kraljevo, next town on the railway from Krushevats, was invested by mixed forces under the command of one of Drazha's lieutenants called Major Djuritch, and more than three thousand chetniks and Partisans were engaged in a battle against the German garrison which consisted of one battalion. Drazha Mihailovitch had taken Gornje Milanovats, with seventy prisoners, and mixed forces were also pressing the important town of Kragujevats. All communications throughout that part of the country had come to a standstill, and telegraph lines were down.

At the conference it was decided to call off the attack on Krushevats until we could be reinforced, and to concentrate on containing the German garrison, in order to prevent it from attacking along the road leading to Kraljevo.

The plan was that a permanent guard should be placed on all the exits from the town, while Novakovitch's thirty men (they had been slightly augmented by recruits during

the march) and the Partisans, who had had the heaviest fighting, should form a mobile reserve, ready to deal with any concentrated break-out. Feeling that I was largely independent, and that the General would be unlikely to call upon me to fight, I elected to go with Stanimir and Radevitch to guard the main Krushevats—Kraljevo road. We had about seventy men, armed with rifles, and two Jugoslav and two captured German L.M.G.s.

We moved off immediately the conference was finished, an hour before dawn, and chose an excellent spot for an ambush about five miles from the town. There were several houses near the road which had been burnt out, and Stanimir explained that between the two attacks the Germans had broken out and, as a reprisal, had burned all the houses within a kilometre of the road on either side for several miles. They had taken the chetniks by surprise and met with no resistance.

We chose a place for our road-block where the road ran through a shallow, narrow valley, with wooded slopes on both sides. Two ruined but stoutly built houses thirty yards from the road served as a strong point, and we mounted in them two of the L.M.G.s. The block itself took us the rest of the day to build, and we used material from the torn-up railway track not far away. We used both sleepers and rails, and finally I judged that even a light tank might have difficulty in negotiating it. We disposed the men on the edge of the woods on either side of the road, with orders not to fire until the signal was given.

Two days passed quietly, and we spent them improving our block and reconnoitring the railway track to make sure that it was impassable. Most of the bridges had been blown and broken down, and we judged that the Germans would only use it as a last resort. Finally we posted scouts a kilometre along the road, and taught them to signal with their rifles the arrival of a convoy and the number of lorries. We had no food, and kept ourselves by visiting by turns the neighbouring vineyards, which covered every southern-facing slope, and eating grapes. They satisfied both hunger and thirst, and were very energizing, but the quantity we needed was surprising. I suppose I ate fourteen or fifteen pounds a day, gnawing them from the bunches like sweet corn. The rest of the time we sat nursing our rifles and watching the dusty white road, brilliant in the sun. The hillsides were deserted except for an occasional peasant, still working in his vineyard.

About two hours after dawn on the third morning, the scouts signalled six lorries, which almost immediately came in sight. I felt a wave of excitement, put a round up the spout, and took a trial sight along the road.

'Steady,' whispered Stanimir. 'Remember you have only twenty rounds.'

'Fifty,' I murmured to myself.

The L.M.G.s wisely held their fire until the leading lorry sighted the block and began to slow up. Then both of those in the houses opened up, and the other two followed suit from the hillside. I saw the windscreen of the leading lorry splinter. The lorry skidded into the side of the road, cannoned off the bank, and overturned. German soldiers began to crawl out, and then we all opened fire. The firing of the guerrillas sounded far too ragged to me to be coming from a hundred rifles, until I remembered—but only after I had fired about ten rounds—that rapid fire in guerrilla warfare is taboo, and you must pick your target very carefully.

The last two lorries turned round immediately and made off in the direction from which they had come, but the other three drew up behind the first, and the Germans began to jump out and take cover in the ditches. But they were at a serious disadvantage, for they could take cover only from one direction at a time, and were being fired on from three. Nevertheless, they quickly had three L.M.G.s in action. Presently, one of our L.M.G.s from the strong point stopped firing, and, soon after it, the other, which left the little force there with only two or three rifles. As soon as they saw this, a small party of Germans, who had escaped unhurt from the leading lorry, began to crawl up the bank towards it. Radevitch ordered all the men within earshot to concentrate their fire on them as they worked themselves through the

undergrowth. By careful sniping we managed to keep their progress very slow, and presently the body of the German fire began to slacken too.

'We must bring this to an end,' said Stanimir. 'In ten minutes the tanks will be here, and I must have their arms.' At that moment Radevitch took up a Véry pistol, which I did not know he had, and shot a white light up into the air. Immediately from two sides, shouting wildly, the guerrillas leapt from their cover and, brandishing their rifles (few of them had bayonets), they ran madly at the Germans on the road. I was borne along on the tide, and found myself running as though I had a fixed bayonet. I should have been at a loss had we caught up with the enemy, but the Germans stood up with their hands in the air, and we never made close contact with them.

The guerrillas descended on them and, in less time than it takes to undress, had stripped the live ones, wounded and unwounded alike, of their boots, weapons, and most of their clothes. In the four lorries there had been about forty men, of whom only eighteen remained unwounded, while eleven were dead. Those who were taken prisoner looked more frightened than I had ever seen men look.

We also stripped the lorries of their contents, which were mostly ammunition. There were four L.M.G.s and two small mortars which had never got into action against us. Radevitch quickly loaded the guerrillas with as much as each man could carry, and then, leaving Stanimir and me with a party of five to destroy the lorries, they all set off to a rendezvous in the hills.

There was no time to lose if we were all to be away before the counter-attack. Quickly we pierced the petrol tanks of three of the lorries, and set fire to them. All the ammunition which the guerrillas had been unable to carry away was placed in the fourth lorry, which, we found, had not been damaged in the fighting, apart from a smashed windscreen. Stanimir leapt into the driving seat, and I clambered up after him. The other five piled into the back. Then we set off up the road straight towards Krushevats. Two hundred yards along the road we turned off to the right and went bouncing over a rutted track towards the hills. After a quarter of an hour's hectic driving, Stanimir pulled up under some trees. We had climbed about five hundred feet, and were looking down almost directly on the spot where the ambush had taken place.

A Stuka was already circling over the burned-out lorries. After about half an hour we saw four of the six light tanks arrive. They looked a very old pattern—not front-line stuff, I thought. Stanimir looked anxiously at his watch.

'If the others do not arrive quickly,' he said, 'the Boches will find out where we have taken their missing lorry, and might follow with the tanks. I am afraid of the tracks in the dust.'

'What will become of the prisoners?' I asked.

'Radevitch will march them barefoot into the hills for a few miles', he said, 'and then let them go. I would not be in their position. All the peasants around are armed. Not many of them will find their way back to Krushevats.'

After the tanks, another and much larger contingent of Germans arrived in lorries, and began picking up the dead and wounded under cover of the tanks' guns.

About an hour later twenty of Radevitch's men arrived to take away the rest of the arms. This included the L.M.G.'s and mortars, several boxes of ammunition, and some tommy-guns.

'Those are not much good to us,' said Stanimir. 'They use far too much ammunition and have no range.

One of the men had a message for Stanimir, who grinned and turned to me. 'Novakovitch is looking for you,' he said. 'He wants you to go straight back to headquarters with this man. You'd better go. There won't be any more excitement to-day. I shall burn this lorry and then rendezvous with the others.'

When I had filled my haversack with spare rounds, I went with the man who had brought the message, to find headquarters.

The General was furious. He made me an unnecessarily long speech, I thought, considering that I could not understand it, in which the word 'officer' and 'discipline' kept recurring. My impression was that he was more jealous than pleased over our little action.

While we had been engaged, news had arrived that the German garrison of Krushevats had been reinforced by a whole new battalion from Nish. The guerrillas attacking Kraljevo were also being hard pressed, and had asked for help. Zakitch had received a request from the Partisan commandant attacking Kraljevo, asking him to deal with one of Kosta Pechanats's *vojvode* called 'The Stork', who had raised a company at Alexandrovats, a rich wine-producing village south of the Morava between Krushevats and Kraljevo. 'The Stork' was known to have offered the services of his men to the Germans, and constituted a menace to the flank of the attacking forces.

Novakovitch and Keserovitch decided to march on Alexandrovats with about a hundred of their combined forces, leaving Zakitch and Radevitch to deal with the increased danger from Krushevats. Always intent on seeing as much new country as I could, I decided to go with the General. Keserovitch took only forty men, and the remainder of the company of a hundred had been made up from the Partisans, among whom were two women.

For food we continued to eat grapes.

During the march to Alexandrovats, which was executed very slowly, and took nearly three days, I took the opportunity of getting to know some of the Partisans. I found that their leaders were all peacetime communists, who had led double lives for many years. They were fanatical and ruthless. This little force also contained a number of students, one of them only sixteen. Nevertheless, more than half were simple peasants, who had joined the Partisans more by luck than judgement, because they wanted to fight the Germans. These men were subjected to a continual and subtle propaganda from their leaders and the students, which they had scarcely the education to resist, so that they very quickly became imbued with communistic ideas.

'The Government in Belgrade under Neditch is bad enough,' said one of them to me, 'but the government under

Simovitch in London is worse. Why did they not stop and fight? Why did the King run away? He is a young man and not married, he could have fought. But it is always the peasant who pays. We have to fight and die for him, so that he can come back and live on us.'

This sort of talk, which might have come from a street-corner orator, went on continually among the Partisans, and the peasants among them were very soon convinced.

I was very careful not to get involved in political arguments, but I found all the time among the Partisans a sense of distrust. They alone of the Serbs seemed to have an active dislike of my nationality.

'England betrayed us,' they said. 'Without Russia, England cannot win the war. We were fools to ally ourselves to you. We should only have been the allies of Russia, which is our mother-country.'

Only the women of the company never tried to argue. One was a pretty, dark-eyed, brown-haired girl, who looked very sad, and seldom spoke at all.

'She joined us in order to be with her brother,' said one of the students. 'The other day he was killed. We had to carry her away, or she would have stayed and given herself up. Before the war she was a schoolmistress in Krushevats. We call her Boginja because she is so good.'

The other girl was a fair and strongly built woman of about thirty, with deep-blue, almost violet eyes. The most surprising thing about her was that her hair always looked as though she had just washed and brushed it, the way it shone in the sun. Her hands were more often clean than those of anybody else. Her name was Daniele, and she told me that she was a Jewess. She carried a heavy German L.M.G.

The battle of Alexandrovats was a farce. We broke down the bridges leading to the town, and cut all the telegraph wires. Then we surrounded it, taking up positions in the vineyards and across the only two roads. Alexandrovats is a little town of about two thousand inhabitants. It has one long main street, metalled with cobbles. It is very prosperous, for the wine produced there is some of the best in Serbia.

'The Stork' had collected a little band of twenty-five men, who were armed on the same scale as most of the guerrillas. But he had applied to the Germans for clothing and permission to requisition food officially for them.

When Novakovitch sent a courier into the town, 'the Stork' immediately surrendered. In an interview with the guerrilla leaders he promised to behave himself, and we all descended into the town and were fêted by its inhabitants.

The townsfolk were extremely kind to me. They gave me good meals, and offered me a bed in one of the best houses. Joshitch, who had been detailed to 'look after' me, was always at my side.

We strolled along the street until we came to a barber's shop. I was trying to explain to the barber that I wanted a haircut and a shave when a woman's voice said in English:

'Can I be of any help?'

It was Daniele. I asked her to explain to the barber what I wanted. Then, when I was wrapped in a towel, 'Can I sit and talk with you?' she asked. 'I speak English quite well.'

She told me that her parents, who were Slovenian Jews, were in England, where they lived in the Lake District. She herself had once been in London, where she had stayed for a week at the Mayfair Hotel.

Looking at her interestedly in the mirror, I noticed that her eyes were beautiful and sad.

'You must have been rich to stay at the Mayfair Hotel,' I said.

'My husband was.'

I wanted to ask what had become of him and only just remembered my manners in time to refrain. But she told me.

'He is Rumanian,' she said, 'and when the Germans came to Belgrade, where we lived, he was afraid because I am a Jewess. So he left me and went back to Bucharest.'

After a pause, she added: 'This is a filthy life.'

'Then why are you here?'

'There is nothing else, and I am a very good machine-gunner.'

'Do you mean to say that you work that thing in battle?' I asked.

'Yes. They used to give me and Boginja the ammunition to carry. When her brother was killed we were left alone with the gun, so I had to work it. I found I could do it very well. It was the first time I had ever fired anything except a little rifle, for sport.'

I asked: 'Do they always make you carry it? Isn't it very heavy?'

'Very. But, if you work it out, it is obvious that we must all carry our own weapons.'

'But why did you ever start this life?'

'It is a very long story,' she replied. 'One day I will tell it you.'

The barber finished my hair, and we left the shop together.

'Do not walk up the street with me,' she said; 'they discourage it.'

'That must make life rather lonely for you,' I said.

'It is. But no more so than for you,' she replied. 'All the people who know enough French to talk with you do not like you because you are English.'

'What is your name?' she asked.

'Christie Lawrence.'

'I shall call you Krsta, because that is Serbian. It means "a cross". Krsta Lorenchitch.'

And she was gone.

During the few days we stayed in Alexandrovats I saw a good deal of Daniele and heard her story. Her parents had been rich, and as a child and young woman she had travelled over most of Europe. For many years their home had been in Austria, but after the Nazi invasion her father had had to flee for his life. Daniele went to Belgrade, where she met the Rumanian who afterwards became her husband, and with him she travelled widely in the Balkans. He fled

immediately after the German invasion, and left her in Belgrade, with very little money and some of her jewels. She sold some of these jewels and made her way to Krushevats, where she had a friend, a Jew, who was a doctor. But the Germans came and arrested him, though, for the moment, they left her alone, for they did not know who she was. Then, partly from fear and partly from hate, she had joined the Partisans.

In Alexandrovats Novakovitch reorganized his forces. He formed a small headquarters, and the remainder he split into platoons of fifteen to twenty men. Each platoon had one L.M.G. Because he was short of officers he offered me the command of one of the platoons. I accepted, but on condition that I should have at least three men who could speak French to act as interpreters. He gave me two, and Daniele was one of them. The other was a young Partisan from Montenegro, called Sima. He had been the most friendly of the students. Of the rest of my men, half came from Keserovitch's company and the others were recruited locally. They had all volunteered to serve with me, and there were sixteen altogether.

Besides the L.M.G. we had two German tommy-guns and five revolvers. I swapped one of the tommy-guns with Popovitch for a dozen bayonets, and fitted most of the riflemen up with them.

With the aid of Sima and Rade Chirakovitch, a miner who had worked in the English mine at Kosovska Mitrovitsa, I rigged up two bayonet sacks, and spent several days in giving my platoon bayonet drill. I then made everyone pool his ammunition and divided it out equally all round. Every man had eighty rounds, and there was nearly two hundred rounds for the L.M.G. Half of this I carried myself and the other half I gave to Rade, whom I made Daniele's No. 2. He agreed at once that he would carry the gun most of the time, and Daniele carried his rifle, but it seemed to be the accepted thing that Daniele should be the gunner.

'She is the best shot I have ever seen,' said Rade. 'At two hundred metres she can put a burst through a saucepan lid!'

During the third week in October, we had orders to prepare to move. We were to take part in the battle of Kraljevo, where Novakovitch hoped to take over command from Major Djuritch. Almost daily, while we had been at Alexandrovats, we had heard the sound of firing from the direction of the main Kraljevo—Krushevats road, and we heard that Radevitch was being hard pressed in his task of keeping the two German forces apart. Small detachments had from time to time succeeded in breaking through from Krushevats to Kraljevo. Our task, said Novakovitch, would probably be to strengthen the attacking forces on the eastern side of Kraljevo, where we should also have the rôle of holding up anyone whom Radevitch let through.

We marched almost immediately. Kraljevo was the biggest battle that had taken place up to that time. The reinforced German garrison now numbered nearly two thousand, with the addition of a few hundred of Kosta Pechanats's chetniks. Outside were more than three thousand guerrillas. Both sides had artillery, and the guerrillas, in the early stages of the battle, had captured a dump of Jugoslav Army 50-kilogram aeroplane bombs, but without their detonators. The guerrillas had three tanks, for which they only had machine-gun ammunition. Of these they had already lost two in a bold and successful action.

One night the Germans had been mustering for an attack and the guerrillas had received word of their rendezvous. The commander of their three tanks had conceived the bold plan of entering the town under cover of dark and driving up to where the German infantry was collecting. As he had hoped, the Germans had thought that the tanks were their own, and let them approach to within fifty yards of their massed troops. At this point the three tanks, which were moving in line ahead, had wheeled and, as they drew abreast of the Germans, opened up with their machine-guns. The element of surprise had been complete, and the attack had been broken up. But two of the tanks had failed

to get back through the German defence system. The remaining one had shot away all its ammunition.

When we arrived within striking distance of the town there had been two or three days of pause in activities. The Germans had been sending out their Serbian levies (Kosta's chetniks) on reconnaissance, and fighting was confined to skirmishing on the outskirts of the town. The guerrillas were, meanwhile, regrouping for another attack.

Novakovitch had announced his intention of taking over complete command of the operations; but Djuritch refused to recognize his authority. Though I was not at the interview between them, I understood that it was heated. The Partisan leaders were also consulted, and, though they declared themselves willing to continue to serve under Djuritch, they would have nothing to do with Novakovitch, who, they said, was untried.

Novakovitch, in a huff, took his small headquarters staff and retired altogether from the scene of the battle. I heard later that he had gone to Bosnia, where he joined up with the Partisans. I never saw him again.

This left Keserovitch in command of our unit. But Djuritch detached my platoon and joined it with a large Partisan force, under the command of an ex-professor of the Kraljevo *lycée,* called Jakchitch.

# VI

Tactically, the battle for Kaljevo, which was the decisive engagement in the whole guerrilla operation of the autumn of 1941, developed very loosely. There was no rigid direction from the commanding staff, chiefly because communications between the scattered units were bad. Moreover the position of the nominal military commander, Mihailovitch's Major Djuritch, was not sufficiently secure, and a disagreement with one of his subordinates frequently meant the latter's withdrawal from the action for several days, until he could be conciliated. This attitude is catching, and I found myself several times refusing to follow a course of action demanded of me by my superiors when it seemed to me inevitable that I should lose too high a proportion of my men. After the initial assault on the town, which took place during the second week in October, and failed owing to lack of co-ordination, the attacking forces had split themselves into three main groups, each of which worked almost entirely independently. Their attention was continually being diverted from the main objective, because of attempts by the Germans to break through from Krushevats and Kragujevats and reinforce their garrison. In this they were several times successful.

In the later stages of the battle the guerrilla command grew steadily weaker, and there was no single co-ordinated attack, although the forces on the south and west of the town penetrated as far as the centre, and for two days held the railway station, effectively sabotaged a factory making rolling stock, and destroyed several locomotives.

Jaktchitch, from the moment I began to serve under his command, used my platoon continuously. We were first thrown into the push which took us as far as the railway station. Progress in this attack was unbearably slow. Time and again the guerrillas outmanœuvred the defending forces, but their chief weakness was that they had not the final thrust which would have pushed their advantage home. They were generally as averse to hand-to-hand fighting as the Germans were. Jaktchitch was not slow to discover the value of my dozen bayonets. If I had consented to provide the final assaulting force as many times as he had wished, I should have lost all my men in the first three days. As it was, I had far heavier casualties than any of the other platoons. My casualties were always quickly replaced, but I would never take a man who had no bayonet.

I quickly taught my platoon how to advance under the cover of fire from Daniele's L.M.G., admirably served by Rade Chirakovitch. With the detachment of a chef carving a steak, and a delicacy of touch that she might have acquired from playing the piano, she would place controlled bursts which kept quiet the hottest of defensive fire. The Germans used to search for her with mortars, but Rade always seemed to know when to move.

Those were exhausting days and nights, with little sleep and nothing much to eat. For a whole week we lived on pumpkin—a tasteless and unsatisfying diet, and not nearly so good as grapes.

When we had taken the railway station, and my platoon had consolidated their small part of the defence of it, I sent Sima back to Jaktchitch to ask to be relieved. Of my original sixteen, I had only twelve, and four of those were lightly wounded. Although the seven replacements were promising men, I did not feel justified in keeping them there any longer, especially as the Germans had started to shell us, and a counter-attack seemed imminent.

Our relief consisted of a newly recruited platoon of peasant Partisans, and I remember thinking that they would not stand for long after hard pressure. But I handed them over all the ammunition I had left—it was not much—and we set off for the rear. As we started it began to rain. And the reaction was killing. Rade, Sima, and I took turns in carrying the L.M.G., for poor Daniele was almost finished. I remember watching her face, on which there were new lines, as she limped with blistered feet beside us. No woman, I thought, should ever be allowed to take part in active Partisan life—their physical disabilities are too great.

We had orders to report to headquarters—twenty miles back, in the Gotch mountains. We had been relieved just before dawn, and during the day were joined by several other platoons, led by one of Jaktchitch's political commissars. The political commissars were important men in the Partisan ranks at that time. They were all leading members of the original Communist Party, and usually they had authority over all but the highest military leaders.

Nightfall found us on the edge of the Gotch woods, with a full five hours' march ahead of us. The political commissar ordered a halt and said we would rest there the night. It was still raining, and he sent out some of his men to collect brushwood for a fire.

I suggested that we should post sentries, but the commissar said it was unnecessary. Soon there was a cheerful blaze, and the men disposed themselves around it.

All day I had been troubled by a nail in one boot, and as soon as everyone was settled I made my way to the light of the fire, to see if I could make it comfortable. I had taken the boot off and was working at the nail with a bayonet, when suddenly there was a burst of tommy-gun fire from the edge of the clearing in which we had halted. A man in my platoon, sleeping beside me, was hit, and half-reared himself up. In an instant everyone was awake. I dropped the boot, snatched up my rifle and bayonet, and made off for the undergrowth at a crouching run. All around me dim figures were doing the same. Ten yards into the undergrowth I paused to listen. There was firing from at least four tommy-guns, fifty yards away on the other side of the fire. The clearing was full of dim figures, but I could not tell whether they were friends or enemies. Then I heard Sima softly calling my name:

'Krsta, Krsta.'

I answered him, and we joined forces. The firing very quickly stopped. It seemed as though nobody from our side answered.

'Where are Rade and Daniele?' I asked.

'I don't know,' said Sima.

'Who attacked us?'

'Probably Kosta's chetniks. The Germans never come out at night,' said Sima.

We waited a few minutes, and then I said I was going back for my boot. Crouching low, I was approaching the fire when somebody from the edge of the undergrowth threw a bomb at me. It landed in the fire, and blew burning sticks all over the place.

'I befoul thy mother, fool,' shouted Sima from the bushes. 'It's Krsta.'

I stood up and approached the fire. There were several bodies on the ground, and among them one of my platoon. The Partisans had left their rifles behind, and I came upon an ammunition-belt, complete with bayonet, which I recognized as belonging to one of my men. I picked it up, and then I searched for my boot.

Meanwhile the rest of the Partisans were sorting out their equipment. The various leaders called a roll, and we found that nearly half were missing.

'Are we all here?' I asked Sima.

'Two men missing, and Dragi Kostitch has lost his rifle,' said Sima. Dragi was one of the new recruits.

My boot was nowhere to be found. Only after half an hour's search did Daniele find its remains. When the bomb had landed in the fire, it had blown a burning log on to it, and set fire to the upper. It was now quite unusable, and this was a hard blow, because boots were scarcer than ammunition.

We scraped a shallow trench with our bayonets, and buried the dead man from our platoon.

Partisan headquarters was on the site of a sawmill, which, during the war, had not been worked. It was very well organized, with a doctor, a limited supply of medical equipment, and a number of Kraljevo girls who had volunteered as nurses. Before the action, the Partisans had laid up a large store of food and, though it was seriously depleted, troops who were resting were always fed with two good meals a day. Every day two sheep were butchered and their meat was used in a stew.

I slept for nearly forty-eight hours, and then mustered the platoon. The missing man had arrived, also without a rifle. I made a little speech, partly in Serbian, and partly through Sima, in which I emphasized the importance of taking care of one's arms in all circumstances. I then said that I would not keep in the platoon the man who had run away, but Dragi could have the chance of staying with us to carry ammunition. His rifle, which Rade had found, and his ammunition belt would be given to a new recruit. I promised that the first rifle captured in battle would go to him. He elected to stay.

A stream of clean, soft water ran through the camp. It had previously provided power for the mill. And there, in the evening, I found Daniele, washing her hair. I watched her until she had finished and was drying it in a towel. Then I approached.

'You have beautiful hair,' I said.

'Thank you,' she answered rather coolly, but her eyes smiled.

'You are not as tough and masculine as you pretend,' I teased her.

'A compliment is a compliment at any time,' she replied. A pause, then she said:

'I am tough enough outside, but inside, I am not. I feel I am no longer really me.'

'What do you mean?' I asked.

'You men! This is all right for you. You kill a few Germans, and you take a town, and what then? Do you think you can hold it? Do you think that the Germans will allow you to hold it? Sitting right across their lines of communication? And if it is not across their lines of communication, what good is it to you? You, an English officer, you have seen the German Army, and you ought to know how useless and cruel all this is. We cannot pit ourselves against them. They must beat us in the end.'

I was a little taken aback. 'Cruel?' I said. 'All our men are volunteers, and, as for the Germans, they are our enemies, and soldiers, and after all——'

'After all, after all,' she replied scornfully. 'It's all right for *us*, *we* don't pay for it. The Germans will never catch *us*. But do you know what will happen? Sooner or later this attack will break down, and then the Germans will come out, and they will take hostages from all the villages we have occupied, and will shoot them. They will burn down the villages, as they did in Poland, and put the children into concentration camps. Have you never thought of the women and children in Kraljevo? What is happening to them? When we blockade the town, no food can get in, and the German garrison takes what is there already. Do you know what it's like to see a little child go hungry, day after day? And when it's all over, what have we accomplished? A few hundred Germans dead, a mere drop in the millions of their army. I tell you we accomplish nothing, nothing.

'We don't even keep the spirit of resistance alive,' she continued. 'These communists, what do *they* want? They want to attract recruits and be strong, so that when Jugoslavia is liberated, as she will be one day by the English or the Russians (but heaven knows when that will be), they will be able to seize power. They are only working with Drazha Mihailovitch because he is too strong for them at the moment. And *he* is as bad. He wants a Serbian dictatorship over the rest of the country. He is not a Jugoslav, he's a Serb. Power, power, that's all any of them want.

'Have you seen these petty little local leaders,' she went on more calmly, 'how they squabble about a man and a gun? Novakovitch went away because he wanted to be a commander, and Djuritch let him go because *he* wanted to be commander. And Jaktchitch prefers Djuritch to Novakovitch because Novakovitch is the stronger man.

'Then *you* look out. You're a pawn, but you have fifteen men, and most of them good ones. They will fight for your support, and try to murder you if they don't get it.'

At that moment Sima came running up.

'The Germans have counter-attacked,' he said. 'They have retaken the railway station and routed the main force. They are driving along the Ibar valley, half-way between Kraljevo and Ushtche.'

Ushtche was a little town on the Ibar, twenty miles south of Kraljevo. It was in Partisan hands.

'Jaktchitch says he's got something for you to do. He wants you at once,' added Sima.

On the way to headquarters I asked Sima if he knew what I was to do.

'Do you know anything about aeroplane bombs?' he asked. 'They want a bridge blown. Could you do it with aeroplane bombs? Their detonators are missing, remember.'

'Is there any other explosive?' I asked.

'I should think so,' said Sima. 'There used to be some T.N.T.'

'Any time-fuse?'

'There's plenty of that, because I've seen it.'

'Tell him, then, that I'll have a crack at it.'

Jaktchitch explained that it was a high, single-span girder railway bridge across the Ibar. It was about fifty yards long and nearly seventy feet high, and spanned a deep gorge.

'We can't hold them much longer. They have been strongly reinforced from Kragujevats and are using mortars and artillery,' he said. 'We have destroyed some of the other bridges, and that has held up their tanks, but you must get there before dawn to-morrow, which gives you nearly ten hours. The bridge is thirty kilometres from here. You can have as many bombs as you like. I have brought them up by ox-wagon.'

'How many horses can you let me have?' I asked.

'Two,' he replied.

'Right. I'll take four bombs, some hand-grenades, and I want some ammunition for my rifles.'

'You can have a hundred rounds,' said Jaktchitch.

'And the L.M.G.?'

'Two hundred in all.'

Rade had assembled the men when I returned. 'I want five riflemen,' I said, 'and someone to carry the ammunition for the L.M.G. Also two men to look after the horses.'

Rade picked the eight best men. 'Are you coming?' I asked Daniele, 'or shall I take the gun?'

It was the only time I ever saw her angry.

We slung a bomb on either side of the two horses, and I packed four pounds of T.N.T. in my pack. Rade also had a dozen hand-grenades of assorted makes. We took bread in our hands, and, with a guide from headquarters, we set out, eating as we marched.

All night, through the dripping trees, we made good progress. As we emerged from the forest, the whole sky on our right hand was lit up.

'What did I tell you?' said Daniele quietly, by my side. 'They are burning already.'

The road was especially bad for the horses. The bombs weighed fifty kilograms each, which made a heavy load for the little mountain ponies. I was still missing one boot, and had my foot wrapped in bandages, which kept wearing out.

We reached the bridge at last, about an hour before dawn. Already firing had started up the valley to the north —and not nearly far enough away to be to my liking. I told the two extra men to off-load the bombs and take the horses back to headquarters. I took the detonators out of the hand-grenades, and showed Rade how to extract the fuse and fix them with the time-fuse which we had brought. He did two perfectly, but the third he bungled, and blew a piece off the top of his finger. Daniele bound it tightly with a handkerchief. I had in the meanwhile prepared six detonators, and I thought that eight would be enough. On to each of the bombs I strapped with string a pound of T.N.T. I tied also two hand-grenades, into which I had reinserted the fuses, to each pound of T.N.T. I allowed two minutes of fuse to make sure of our getaway. Then we placed the four bombs end-to-end across the single track.

By the time we were ready it was dawn. The battle had flared up and I judged that it could not be more than a mile or two, if that, to the north. I posted the five riflemen, and

Daniele, with the gun covering the road and railway to the north, though I judged that the Germans would not use the railway at that spot, because of the frequent tunnels. Then I lit the fuses. I ran the hundred and fifty yards to where the rest of the men were, and waited breathlessly. The fuses seemed to take hours to burn. Then there was a single, shattering explosion and, with a rending of steel, the bridge collapsed into the river below. It was perfect.

I had stood up to admire my handiwork when suddenly, beside me, Daniele opened fire. With her usual efficiency, she had not taken her eyes off the road. Three German scout cars had come round the bend. But, no doubt rendered jumpy by the sound of the explosion, they stopped when Daniele fired on them.

My men had ten rounds each, and Daniele a hundred and fifty. The scout cars sprayed the hill with machine-gun fire. Daniele silenced the first. She must have put a burst straight through the loophole. The range was about a hundred and fifty yards. Then, one by one, the men stopped firing as they ran out of ammunition.

'Retreat,' I shouted at them, and they did so, keeping under cover of the rocks.

Daniele went on firing until the belt was empty.

'That's the end,' she said, and raised herself on her elbows.

'Keep down!' screamed Sima. But it was too late. With a little cry, Daniele collapsed over the gun.

Rade and I lifted her, and eased our way up the hillside, towards the crest where we should be out of sight. We had about a hundred yards to cover and, though it normally would have been easy because of the rocks, we made heavy going of it, for we carried Daniele between us.

When we had passed completely out of the line of fire we put her down, and I opened her shirt. A bullet had entered just above the left breast, and passed out below the shoulder-blade, leaving a jagged hole. She was bleeding profusely from the wound in her back. I took out my only clean shirt from my haversack, and we bound her up as best we could.

Then Sima cut a couple of ash saplings, and we made a stretcher with Rade's blanket.

But, long before we reached headquarters, she had died. We went on carrying her automatically, each taking turns to rest.

Jaktchitch was not at headquarters when we reached there. The political commissar had been left in charge. I told him that the bridge was blown.

'Good,' he said. 'Who is that?'

'Daniele, my machine-gunner,' I answered.

'Is she dead?'

'Yes.'

'Have you brought the gun?'

'No.'

'Why not? What is the use of a body? A machine-gun is worth five live men, and five hundred dead ones.'

There did not seem to be anything to say. The commissar and I were poles apart. As I turned away he remarked that, had it been anyone else, he would have had him shot, which was boastful nonsense, and he knew it.

Rade, Sima and I were very tired. Since we had set out twenty-four hours earlier, we had not slept or eaten. We took a spade and our rifles, and carried Daniele deep into the woods. Under a very tall beech we dug a hole and buried her. Sima wrapped her head in a towel, because, he said, he could not bear to think of the dirt in her hair.

Then, by common consent, we set out, not for the headquarters, but away from it.

That evening we slept in a peasant's house, so far from the dying battle that we could only very faintly hear the guns.

'It's a terrible thing,' said the peasant, 'yesterday they burned Kamenitza, Vrba, and Vitanovats. I saw Vrba from the hill, burning. To-day they will take Ushtche. God grant better times.'

The next day we pressed farther into the hills, at the northern end of the range called the Kopaonik.

At evening we came to a peasant's house that had not even a cart-track leading to it.

'How much money have we between us?' asked Sima. I produced eighty dinars, Rade a hundred and twenty, and Sima thirty.

'Listen,' said Rade to the peasant, when we had found him, 'we will each pay you twenty dinars a day if you will let us stay here. Here is all the money we have.'

But the peasant waved the money away, and told us to come in. That was the end of the second week in November.

The battle of Kraljevo ended unheroically, in bathos. Open warfare broke out between the Partisans and the forces of Drazha Mihailovitch. The respective commanders of these forces in the vicinity of Kraljevo received orders to stop fighting the Germans and to fight each other. But their men were so intermingled, and friendships and loyalties so mixed, that the orders were not obeyed. The attack just disintegrated. Those who happened to find themselves with the Partisans went one way, and those with Drazha Mihailovitch's leaders went the other. But all who could merely went home.

It was about this time that King Peter appointed Drazha Mihailovitch General and Commandant of all guerrilla forces in the country. This was, in fact, the first encouragement we had gained from the British radio since the beginning of the campaign, and it came too late. Uzhitsa had been taken from the Germans at the end of September, and Chachak a week or two later. Both these towns were held for two months. During the whole of this time not a train moved, and communications over most of the centre of the country broke down. The whole of Jugoslav economic life was brought to a standstill. But not once, until the battle was over, was any mention of it made by the British. It was obvious that nobody knew anything about it. It would have been a great help, only to hear our efforts reported. Even the Partisans would have paid attention.

Winter advanced very rapidly, and it grew steadily colder. I still had only one boot. Rade, Sima, and I mooned about the hills, daily hearing of new burnings and shootings by

the Germans in the vicinity of Kraljevo. Finally, we learned that Gornje Milanovats, after changing hands between Drazha Mihailovitch and the Germans seven times, had been completely burned out and abandoned by them.

One day, towards the end of November, a very weary and dirty-looking chetnik knocked at the door of the house where we were living. His face, behind a beard, seemed vaguely familiar. It was Joshitch. In the Balkan manner we greeted each other joyously, though I had never particularly liked him. He was looking for Keserovitch, who, when the battle had ended, had disbanded most of his men and collected a small band of odds an ends who did not particularly want to become Partisans. With these he was retiring into the heights of the Kopaonik.

Rade, Sima, and I quickly decided that we would join him. We had previously discussed the possibility of crossing Macedonia again and trying the Turkish border, but with winter coming on, and no food to be had in the fields, it seemed an arduous undertaking. In the meanwhile, we were becoming bored with doing nothing.

We eventually found Keserovitch, in a village not far away. He had three officers: Vlakovitch, a captain in the Medical Corps of the Jugoslav Army, though not a qualified doctor; Popovitch, whom I had already met at the conference of the leaders of the attacking forces; and a young ex-pilot of the regular Air Force, whose first name was Radiuje. The band now consisted of only thirty or forty guerrillas, for Keserovitch's casualties in the fighting had been heavy and he had disbanded many of his men. He was now only very poorly equipped with two L.M.G.s and a few hand-grenades. There was little ammunition for his rifles.

His plan was to retire to the Kopaonik, and hold it against all comers until the country had settled down. He would then declare his allegiance to whomever it seemed politic. He rightly considered the Kopaonik so important strategically in guerrilla warfare as to make the support of the person who controlled it more than welcome to any side.

The village in which he hoped to winter, called Kriva

Reka, was about fifteen miles from the small mountain town of Brus, and twenty from Alexandrovats, which was still occupied by 'the Stork'. 'The Stork', in spite of his promises to Novakovitch, had not taken any part in the previous guerrilla fighting, but, on the other hand, had not helped the Germans. He was sitting growing fat as a twopenny dictator.

Between the time that Rade, Sima, and I joined Keserovitch, and our arrival in Kriva Reka, we had to avoid, by a forced march across the mountain, an attack by mixed forces of Kosta Pechanats and the new militia which was being formed by General Neditch, the quisling Prime Minister. To evade them was easy, for we had been warned of their approach—they came from Vrnjatchka Banja—several days before their arrival. When they arrived in the village in which we had been they found no trace of us, though we were only a few miles away. They contented themselves with ransacking the houses in which our men had been billeted. With them they brought a woman spy who led them into the village and showed them exactly where we had been. She was, ironically enough, the daughter of the old man in whose house we had made our headquarters. Keserovitch later caught her and, with her father's consent, caused her to be summarily shot.

We arrived at Kriva Reka on the 14th of December 1941, and on that day the snow set in. Keserovitch established us in the village schoolhouse, which was thenceforth declared to be closed. It had been run by a single mistress, an attractive girl who, for a short time, succumbed, from sheer boredom, to the advances of Radiuje the pilot. But she tired of guerrilla life in less than a fortnight.

The school was a long, low building, at one end of which were three small rooms which had constituted the mistress's quarters. Besides, there was only one other room, a large schoolroom, in which the men were billeted. When we arrived, it was filled with desks, but the guerrillas soon dumped them outside. All round the sides of the room they piled straw, a foot thick after it had been trampled down,

and this served as a communal bed. Of course, after one night the whole of it was lousy, for we were all full of lice.

I tried, for a short time, living with the officers, but I found the atmosphere among them insupportable. They shouted arguments at each other all day long, and frequently there was violent quarrelling among them. They were disgustingly greedy over their food, which was a hundred times better than that which they took the trouble to provide for the men. Soon I transferred my quarters to the big schoolroom and lived with the men, whom I found preferable. Rade, Sima, and I took possession of the corner farthest from the stove, which every night was stoked into a red-hot blaze. There we managed to enjoy simple pleasures. There was a man with an accordion, and the soldiers taught me to dance the native folk dances, called *kole*. In return, I taught them some of the modern 'action' dances, like the Palais Glide and the Chestnut Tree, from which they had endless amusement.

Keserovitch knew that, if he were attacked, he could not fight. He also knew that any Partisans there might be in the neighbourhood would be in a similar state. He therefore started a campaign of bluff. He had many good friends in all the neighbouring towns and villages, and even in the occupied town of Krushevats. He obtained from there a Roneo machine, and started to publish violent propaganda against the Germans, Kosta Pechanats, and Neditch, and the army which he was raising to combat Mihailovitch and the Partisans.

So frequently were Keserovitch's broadsheets nailed on the doors of houses in which Germans were billeted in Krushevats, and left in cafés and barbers' shops, that everyone was soon convinced that he must have at least a well-armed battalion at his command.

When the British radio began daily to proclaim Mihailovitch official commander of the Jugoslav guerrilla forces, and King Peter promoted him first Divisional General, and then General of an Army, and finally, War Minister, Keserovitch thought that the cat had jumped. He therefore sent a messenger off to Mihailovitch, declared his allegiance to him, and asked for orders. After about a fortnight, the messenger came back, with orders which were little to Keserovitch's liking, though greatly to his convenience. They were that, for the moment, he was to take action against nobody at all. If he were threatened with attack, he was to evade it. Finally, Mihailovitch appointed him military commandant and governor of the Provinces of Alexandrovats and Brus.

This, in fact, he already was. There were no Germans in either of those provinces. The only rival power was 'the Stork' in Alexandrovats, who went in mortal fear of him. Keserovitch's word, irresponsible as it often was, was law in both provinces. He summoned the chief of police in Brus and, in a stormy interview, in which Keserovitch did all the talking, put the fear of the devil into him.

The messenger who came back from Drazha Mihailovitch also brought other news. He said that there was with Mihailovitch a British captain, who had arrived by submarine on the Dalmatian coast, and made his way through Montenegro to find him. He said also that in November Mihailovitch had only just escaped capture, in an attack by four German divisions on his mountain stronghold of Ravna Gora. He had had to disband most of his men, and had concealed himself in the oven of a peasant's house. Simultaneously, from the only side which the Germans had left open, the Partisans had attacked, and almost succeeded where the Germans had failed. There was no longer any doubt that relations between Mihailovitch and the Partisans were so badly broken as to be almost past mending.

Other new powers were also growing up in the land. Zakitch's communists had dug themselves in on a range south of Krushevats, called the Jastrevats, where they were behaving similarly to Keserovitch on the Kopaonik. Radevitch seemed to have disappeared temporarily.

Two of the *vojvode* of Kosta Pechanats had become notorious. The noisier was called Mashan Djurovitch. He had raised a large force under German tutelage to combat the Albanian bands whom the Italians had armed to create trouble along the new southern border, and who had begun to get out of hand. Mashan had dealt with them very efficiently, and was now turning his eyes to new fields. The Albanians had always been hated in Serbia, partly because of the traditional fear of their religion; and Mashan, in fighting against them, made himself very popular in the southern part of the province of the Kopaonik, and in the valley of the Ibar, from which districts he drew the greater part of his forces. He was jealous of Keserovitch's influence, for he wished to command also the provinces over which Keserovitch ruled. He sent two expeditions against Keserovitch in Kriva Reka, but Keserovitch evaded them with ease, and on one occasion even parleyed with his officers.

The second of the notorious *vojvode*, on Keserovitch's other flank, was a priest known as *Vojvoda* Mika, who ruled the little town of Blatse. He was a despot, for he too had a loyal and unscrupulous band, whom he kept with him by allowing them to pillage the countryside at random. Endless cruelties were recounted of him. He was, in particular, a runner after women.

If Mika found a peasant whose wife pleased him, he would summon the man to headquarters, and present him with the triple choice of allowing her to become Mika's mistress for a short time, or paying 70,000 dinars, or being hanged. Some were hanged, some paid the money—a fierce sum for a peasant, even in those times of inflation—and some allowed their wives to save them.

In similar matters, Djurovitch's reputation was little better.

Neditch's army was also growing apace, and soon there were companies in all the main towns, and many smaller ones. None dared yet appear, however, in Alexandrovats or Brus, because of Keserovitch.

By Christmas the snow was two feet deep on the Kopaonik. The air was nearly always clear and frosty. Outside the school in which we lived there was a little fountain of running water, and there we used to wash each morning, naked from the waist up, in the frosty atmosphere. It was strange that one seldom felt cold. The greatest hardship for me was that I was still without boots and, at times, covered miles over the snow with my feet wrapped in rags.

Christmas came suddenly, before I realized that it was near. On Christmas Eve a man arrived from Alexandrovats with a sack. It was addressed to me, and it was filled with good things to eat, from the people of Alexandrovats. 'Your Christmas is not ours,' they wrote in a little letter, 'for we are of the Serbian Orthodox Church. But we remember you, and know that you have endured hardships on our behalf. We wish you a speedy and safe return to your own country.'

With a barrel of *rakija* subscribed to by all of us who had money—many had none—we held a celebration, which started early in the afternoon of Christmas Day. The *rakija* flowed, and everyone was very happy. The soldiers were like children, when they played. There were elaborate practical jokes, in which someone had his face blackened, and someone else sat in a bowl of water. Everybody laughed uproariously.

By four o'clock Keserovitch was drunk, and started a quarrel with one of his men over an alleged breach of discipline. Drawing his revolver he was about to shoot him when Vlakovitch intervened. The officers then withdrew to their own quarters, and, after this, the spirit went out of the day. The party broke up. I was bitterly disappointed. My Christmas, which had meant so much, was ruined.

In the evening, we switched on the radio, as usual, to hear the news from London. First, the time signal. Then, suddenly, Christmas bells. 'Holy Night', and 'O come, all ye faithful'. A wave of homesickness hit me that I could not resist. I went outside and wept. Only Vlakovitch and Sima saw me go. Vlakovitch came out a few minutes later.

'We'll do the night patrol together,' he said. 'Sima will lend you his boots.'

We went out and walked all night through the woods and over the hills. The sky was like blue glass, and the moon lit the ground almost as clearly as day. We saw the white houses

of Brus in the valley from eight miles away. When we arrived back, shortly after dawn, I felt equal to facing the situation once more.

After Christmas, another courier arrived from Mihailovitch. His chief news was that Mihailovitch no longer wanted any of his men to be known as chetniks. They were to be called 'Jugoslovenska Vojska u Otatchbine', which means 'the Jugoslav Army in the Fatherland'; and shortly after this, the British radio started to call us that, too.

The Orthodox Christmas came and went, and we continued to exist in the heart of the mountains. Food became scarcer and scarcer, and we were soon rationed to one good meal a day (the officers continued to eat three). We were living on the land; that is to say, on the peasants, who in that province have never been rich. Their principal crop was oats which, in pre-war times, they had sold to the Jugoslav Army commissariat. The price had been the same as that for wheat, which had meant that they could eat wheaten bread. Now, of course, there was no Army commissariat, and the peasants were forced to make their bread of oats. They were not used to it, and the result was black, heavy, unpalatable stuff.

Our requisitions were equally as severe as the Germans', and much more searching. As the winter advanced, it became increasingly difficult to get supplies. Keserovitch, admittedly, paid the full market price for everything he took, but money was of little use to the peasants, for there was nothing to buy. The price of a kilo of wheaten meal had risen during the year from 2 dinars to 90.

In January 1942 I suffered from a frost-bitten foot, shingles, and toothache, and was crawling with lice. Though I was making very rapid strides with the language, which I talked with great fluency but with a very limited, peasant vocabulary, I was desperately bored.

There were continual reports that two Englishmen were living in Brus. They were, said the reports, escaped prisoners of war, like myself. The temptation to hear my own language again proved too great to resist.

I told Keserovitch that my tooth had become unbearable, which, in fact, it had, and, with Rade as a guide, set out. I found that Brus was the size of Alexandrovats, without its attractiveness. It had a few shops, an orphanage, a hospital, and several cafés. It was too far off the beaten track for the Germans to occupy it. Besides, they could not afford the garrison that would have been needed to defend itself against the legendary force that Keserovitch had built up.

I first called at the hospital and had my tooth out, without anaesthetic, which was scarce, and obtained some ointment for my shingles, which had become open sores round my waist. We then called on the local bootmaker and, with money which Rade had obtained from Vlakovitch for the purpose, bought a pair of boots. It was so easy that I was furious with Keserovitch for not having taken the trouble to do it before; there were several of his men who suffered hardship on patrol without boots, and though we had made frequent requests to him he had always made some excuse.

The Englishmen, they told us, were living at the orphanage, and there, coming through the gate with flushed faces, skis on their shoulders, and covered with fine snow, we found them. I was delighted that the younger was one of the two sapper subalterns who had been with me on the P.O.W. train, and who had jumped out of the cattle-truck a few minutes before Ron Jones and myself. His name was Peter Maynard, and he lived, as far as I remember, in Sussex. The other was a big and older man, an Englishman in the Australian Expeditionary Force, called Denis Boon. We went to one of the cafés and had a meal, and I talked and talked. It was such a relief to speak English freely that I could not stop talking. Evening drew on, and we drank so much wine that I lost count of the glasses. Peter and Denis were very witty. I only stopped talking when I became so drunk that I had to be put to bed.

In the morning, Rade agreed to tell Keserovitch that I had to stay in Brus for treatment of my shingles.

Then Peter and Denis introduced me to the woman

doctor who ran the orphanage. She immediately offered me a bed there, with the others, for as long as I liked to stay. I confessed that I was lousy, and she was sympathetic. She gave me some ointment, and arranged to have all my clothes fumigated. In two or three days I felt like a new man.

The doctor was a cultured woman, and she, Peter, Denis, and I had our meals together, and very gay meals they were. She spoke French fluently, and had learned a little English, 'in order,' she said, 'to keep up to date with my medicine.'

Everyone in Brus was kind to us. In conversation with some of the people I learned things that had been going on in other parts of the country.

In Toplitsa, Zakitch's Partisans had been in action against Kosta Pechanats's chetniks, and had been defeated, after having taken and held Kurshumlje for a short while. After their defeat, Bulgarian troops had occupied the whole area. Jaktchitch had been killed—Partisan casualties were heavy—and seventy of his men had been taken and hanged publicly along the wayside by one of the local *vojvode,* an Army captain called Marijanitch.

*Vojvoda* Mika the Priest had been assassinated at long last by an ex-colonel of the Jugoslav Air Force, a hero of the Great War. The colonel had fled, and was believed to be in hiding in a distant province of Toplitsa. The Blatse chetnik company was now under the command of Mika's equally infamous adjutant, Dushan the Albanian.

For nearly a fortnight Peter, Denis, and I borrowed some skis and learned to use them on a slope behind the orphanage, and we joined the young people of the town in bobsleigh rides through the sloping streets. Except for the scarcity of tobacco and luxuries, the war seemed very far distant.

One day I asked the doctor: 'Where do all these children in your care come from?'

'Kraljevo,' she said. 'They are mostly children who were orphaned after the battle last autumn.'

'I was in that battle,' I told her, rather proudly.

'Have you heard the full result?' she asked.

'Of course,' I said enthusiastically. 'We surrounded it for nearly two months, and nothing came or went. All the communications cut, and the railway torn up for miles, bridges blown and mined . . .'

'Not that,' she replied quietly, 'the *full* result. Not just one side of it. When the battle was over, and you heroes retired to your mountain fastnesses, the Germans started quietly to take measures against your future action. They shot nine thousand hostages—three hundred for every German you killed. They burned to the ground seventeen villages. In Kraljevo there is not a family which has not lost one of its members, and all the refugees from the north were shot. Your military objectives may, of course, have been worth all this, but I cannot know anything about that. All that I see is suffering among the people—my people. These orphans here are the lucky ones. They are about one per cent of the people who are destitute.'

'What has happened to the others?'

'Some were adopted by friends, some are maintained by a special committee set up in Kraljevo, but many, many are starving.'

This conversation brought to an end the peace of mind which I had attained in Brus. Thinking things over in the days that followed, I resolved that I must find out the truth. I resolved then and there that I would see Drazha Mihailovitch and ask him. I would find the British captain at his headquarters and ask him. And, if possible, I would find out Kosta Pechanats, apparently a fifth columnist, but with many followers (it had to be admitted) among men who appeared to be perfectly good patriots, and I would ask him too. Nor would I make up my mind until I had also spoken to several communist leaders.

Many questions were continually and obstinately asking themselves in my mind. Was it enough merely to fight the Germans? What did Mihailovitch's present policy of passivity mean? How could one continue to resist in the face of the terrible German reprisals? And, last, but most important, how much of Mihailovitch's policy was dictated by the British officer at his headquarters?

My first resolution was to find Drazha Mihailovitch. But the question was, how?

# VII

Naturally, the first opinion I sought was that of Peter Maynard and Denis Boon. They had lived with respectable people, most of whom had taken no part in the fighting and supported neither Mihailovitch nor the Partisans. Such people principally belonged to that very large section of the population which believed that all forms of guerrilla activity were merely demonstrations of internal politics. The leaders, they said, were struggling for power. They accused Drazha Mihailovitch of raising the rebellion in 1941, only because he wanted to make his name known and popularize it, and thus to attract to his standard men who had refused to follow Kosta Pechanats. Kosta, in their opinion, was also merely following his own fortune. He believed that the Germans would win the war, and he was therefore playing on both sides of the fence. But, having large armed forces throughout the country, he would be in an admirable position to attack the Germans' retreating armies, should the war turn against them. His men all behaved like ardent patriots. They sang loyal songs about King Peter and the dynasty and their country, and they affected to despise the Government which paid them their money.

The Partisans were by far the most unpopular of the three main forces. They of all appeared to have least regard for the good of the people. Their actions were indiscriminate; they killed a German officer here or a soldier there, irrespective of the subsequent reprisals. The occupation authorities had recently declared that, for every German killed by resistance forces of any denomination, 300 Serbian hostages would be shot, and, certainly for some months, this policy was carried out. But the Partisans were in no way deterred by it. Convinced that their ideology would in the end ensure the greatest good, they persevered in spite of the

people's sufferings. Except by a small knot of violent supporters in every centre, they were feared and hated, especially by the peasants, on whom they lived and depended for supplies.

These opinions were also the opinions of Peter and Denis, and for many reasons they carried weight with me. I had already observed that there was a vast body of Serbs who dissociated themselves from all the various military and political activity with which the country was rent. They farmed their land, or they kept open their little shops. Their role was not spectacular, and they made no claim to being heroes. But they continued to bring children into the world in as normal conditions as possible, and to educate them to the best of their ability. Some of them openly said, 'We will fight, but the time is not yet'; others merely plodded through this grim part of their life, confident that better times were ahead. These men were not cowards. Some of them risked their lives and their homes to help Peter and Denis and me, and other fugitives who begged their aid. But it was obvious that, in the melting-pot into which the occupation had turned the country, they were the only solid element, and the only truly productive force. It was among them, and not among the guerrillas, that the true spirit of the country was kept alive.

Peter and Denis, therefore, maintained that it would be wrong for us, at this stage, to become enmeshed with either one or another of the guerrilla orders. Whatever line of action we took, we could not be sure that it would be the right one and really helpful to the Allied cause, or in keeping with the dignity or impartiality of a British officer.

'The war is going on for some time yet,' said Peter to me, 'and when the situation becomes clear enough to allow us to see what we ought to do, then we'll do it. But until then it seems to me foolish to risk our lives and, more important, our integrity, doing the wrong thing.'

There were two main arguments with which I countered this attitude. The first was that the British radio daily urged the Serbs to join themselves to the organization of Drazha Mihailovitch. The second was more personal, and I was unwilling to press it, because it sounded priggish. I felt that, having relieved the Germans of the task of guarding and feeding us, we must do something about it other than just sit. If it was impossible—as for the time being it seemed to be—to make our way back through neutral territory to our own armies, we ought to make ourselves a nuisance to the Germans in some other way. I resolved to continue to collect all the information I could.

Keserovitch maintained a standing patrol in Brus, which was relieved every three days. Sima used to volunteer for this duty, because he had several friends there who had served with him in Zakitch's Partisan company. With them he was often to be seen in cafés, deep in conversation.

He was becoming more and more anti-Keserovitch. He maintained that Keserovitch was unnecessarily brutal, both with his own men and with the peasants around, and that he was falling more and more under the evil, self-seeking influence of Popovitch, his adjutant, and the ex-pilot Radiuje, who were hotheads, and who both advocated immediate and open rupture with the Partisans. The truth was that their fancies had been tickled by Keserovitch's appointment as Drazha's representative in Brus and Alexandrovats, and they wished to expand their territory.

The rich valley of the River Toplitsa, from which Keserovitch obtained most of his food, remained largely under the influence of Kosta Pechanats, especially since the death and defeat of Zakitch. It was in that direction that Keserovitch and these two officers now turned their eyes.

They therefore sent a messenger to Drazha Mihailovitch, requesting him to send an officer from his staff to substantiate their claims to it. This officer eventually arrived, and, after a very cursory survey, in which he was shown less than half of one side of the picture, returned to Mihailovitch and advised him that at least three of the four main provinces in the valley of the Toplitsa should be placed under Keserovitch's control. Meanwhile, said Sima, there remained a nucleus of sensible men in the company, of whom Vlakovitch and Rade were the leaders, who tried to put the brake

on the more extravagant of Keserovitch's projects, and the hardest of his disciplinary punishments.

My opportunity to find Drazha Mihailovitch was provided by the arrival in Brus of Stanimir Radenkovitch, with whom I had fought my first guerrilla action. He had come, with messages from Colonel Radevitch, to find Keserovitch and to confer with him.

Radevitch's company had been well-nigh annihilated in the closing stages of the battle of Kraljevo, and he had been lying low, watching developments, ever since. He did not know to whom to offer his allegiance. When the British radio had started to proclaim Mihailovitch leader of all the guerrilla forces, Radevitch had sent Stanimir to make contact with him, and Mihailovitch had already sent him orders to start to organize a secret resistance army in the two most westerly of the provinces of the Toplitsa. Radevitch was therefore put out when, over his head, Keserovitch was appointed to command, not only these two provinces, but also another in the same valley. Stanimir had now come with the difficult task of straightening this situation out.

When he returned to Brus from Kriva Reka, where he had seen Keserovitch, he was well satisfied with his diplomacy. Keserovitch had no objection to Radevitch's presence in the two provinces of Toplitsa, but insisted that he should be under his own command. This, said Stanimir, was a more satisfactory arrangement than he had at first expected to make. Keserovitch was in a stronger position than Radevitch, for he had at least a small company, whereas Radevitch had none. For the time being, therefore, Radevitch would have to placate him. But it was now imperative that he should, as quickly as possible, dig himself in in Toplitsa, so that he would eventually be able to snap his fingers at Keserovitch.

When Stanimir found me with apparently nothing to do, he immediately invited me to go with him, first to the place where Radevitch was still in hiding, and then on the journey that he would have to make to the headquarters of Mihailovitch, to report on the position and receive final orders. Before I accepted I went to Kriva Reka to consult Keserovitch, whom I still regarded, at least nominally, as being my commanding officer. In our interview Keserovitch was arrogant and unreasonable. He was unwilling that I should leave him, and would not accept a promise to return. My value to him, as I had already realized, was that the presence of a British officer gave his activities a legal aspect in the eyes of the peasants.

I pointed out to Keserovitch, trying to make him understand my point of view, that, if the rumour that there was a British officer with Mihailovitch were true, it was from him alone that I could take orders, and that it was necessary that I should see him at least once.

'That British officer,' said Keserovitch, 'don't you know that Mihailovitch almost shot him? He's nothing but a fifth-columnist.'

I became angry.

'That alone is enough to decide me,' I retorted; 'if there is a breach between Mihailovitch and this officer, then I must know the truth of it.'

From that day, my relations with Keserovitch were never amiable.

Stanimir was an efficient and indefatigable courier. He knew the country like the back of his hand. He seldom used main roads, travelling for the main part on foot across obscure mountain paths, covering incredible distances in a day. But his chief asset was that he knew his countrymen so well that he seemed to divine when to be cautious and when bold. He could tell in a moment, in a dangerous corner, whether the correct tactics were to parley, fight, or run away.

'Radevitch has collected a very fine staff,' said Stanimir to me on the first day of our journey. 'I wish you would join us, at least for a while. We could use you. At least we should not ask you to sit on the top of a mountain, and without boots.'

'Where is Radevitch?' I asked.

'Near Trstenik, in the Ljubostenje monastery.'

'But surely,' I protested, 'that is the headquarters of Gorditch, Kosta's *vojvoda* there.'

'It is,' replied Stanimir. 'But do you know nothing about Bogdan Gorditch except that he is Kosta's *vojvoda*?'

'I know that he has carried on negotiations with Keserovitch, and that Keserovitch bought some wheat from him last month,' I replied.

'Ah,' said Stanimir, 'there is much more to it.

'Bogdan Gorditch,' he continued, 'was the son of a shopkeeper in Trstenik. During the last war, which broke out when he was about ten, his father went off with the Army, and fought on the Balkan front with the Allies. That left his mother alone. The people of Trstenik suffered greatly during the occupation, because of the guerrilla activity which went on in the Gotch mountains. The Germans and Bulgarians, who were both at various times in Trstenik, took many hostages, and among them were two of Bogdan's elder brothers. (I only tell you this because it has a bearing, I think, on what has happened in Trstenik during this war.)

'Bogdan's father was killed on the Balkan front,' continued Stanimir, 'and young Bogdan, at the age of about fifteen, was alone in the world, and more or less destitute, for his mother had died and the shop was ruined. But he worked hard, and is now one of the richest men in the place —a very successful merchant.

'When the war broke out this time, and the country was overrun, Bogdan contacted Kosta Pechanats, who made him *vojvoda*. He was also on the Bukulja at the time when Kosta Pechanats made his decision to co-operate with the Germans. Now Bogdan took this decision for what he thought it was worth. His main object was then, and still is, to save the people of his native place from the sufferings they endured during the last war. He therefore became *vojvoda* of the Trstenik company of chetniks, and was responsible to the Germans' representative for maintaining order in the place.

'He received pay for all his chetniks, and at that time had about fifty. But they were all local men, and he sent them to their homes, where they lived, being on duty for very short periods. He used the money to build up, in the town, a store of food—wheat, oil, fat, and soap, and salt too, which is very hard to come by nowadays. When the inflation began to be felt, and one could not buy anything except at prohibitive prices, he set up agencies in all the villages around, and has been selling these stores to the peasants at less than a third of what they would have had to pay elsewhere. Not only is there no shortage in his district, but it is the only place where serious inflation is held in check. And nobody can take undue advantage of this, because Bogdan's chetniks share out the food in the villages, so much to each family, according to the amount of land they have and the number of people they must support.'

'And what does Gorditch make out of this?' I asked sceptically, for I could not imagine a Serb so altruistic.

'Undoubtedly he is twice as rich now as he was before the war, and he was rich then,' said Stanimir. 'But his popularity in the surrounding district is very great. He commands five companies now, with nearly eight hundred rifles.'

'Does he receive pay for all these men?'

'Most of them.'

'Then his income is about 1,600,000 dinars a month.'

'About that. But most of it is used in buying more food for the peasants and townspeople. You will see when we are in Trstenik.'

'Did any of his men fight against us in the autumn?' I asked.

'No,' said Stanimir. 'In those days, there was not a clear dividing line between any of the forces. You know that you could not tell the difference between the Partisans, for example, and Drazha's men. Similarly, there were degrees of hostility in the attitude of the chetniks of Kosta Pechanats. Gorditch's men remained passive. You may criticize them for that. But their presence kept the Germans out of Trstenik, and also, because neither we nor the Partisans wished to add to the number of our active enemies, the guerrilla forces. The result was that, as Gorditch had visualized, there was no fighting for several miles around,

and no hostages were taken from the villages, or from the town. Gorditch, in any case, could not have fought effectively, for we were using the very ammunition which he had obtained from the Germans to defend himself and them from us.'

Stanimir paused, and continued: 'When the attack broke up, and many of our men were fugitives, Gorditch was successful in concealing them and getting them away. Radevitch and I were among them.'

'What have you been doing all the winter?' I asked.

'My own story,' said Stanimir, 'goes back to before the autumn. Last May I was elected *pretsednik* of my village, near Krushevats. My job was, of course, to maintain order. And the way I carried it out was to raise a guerrilla band from the young men, and lead them, with Radevitch, in the attack on Krushevats. After the attack failed, the Germans visited the village, and arrested my father and sister. They announced that they would hold them as hostages until I gave myself up. At that time I was living with Radevitch in one of Bogdan's villages, quite near Ljubostenje. When the order appeared—it was published in the papers, and by means of posters in all the towns around Krushevats—Bogdan, who had more of the Germans' confidence than most of Kosta's *vojvode,* told them that he could personally vouch that I had been killed in action not far from Trstenik, and that my grave was among the new ones there, which are, in fact, graves of Partisans killed on the Gotch. Bogdan had a tombstone made, and my name carved on it. The Germans came and inspected it, and believed him. They released my father and sister, who are now living at home again. But even they believe that I am dead, for I dare not go home, and have kept away because of the danger to them. Gorditch then enrolled both me and Radevitch, under false names, as his chetniks, and gave us passes stamped with the stamp of the local German commander. We can travel nearly anywhere with them. But I don't use mine, except in emergencies, because I don't want to run unnecessary risks.'

We had been walking along the road from Brus to Alexandrovats, but at this point we turned off left-handed and followed a little stream into the mountains. Though it had not snowed for several weeks, snow still lay thick on the ground, for it was still very cold. There was a hard crust on the mountain paths, which the peasants had made with their feet, and walking was not difficult. I was still new to the comfort of having boots again, though the foot which had been frost-bitten was still tender.

We climbed about a thousand feet, and had a meal in a peasant's house. One of the most surprising things in the Serbian mountains, although they were neither particularly high nor difficult to climb on foot or on horseback, was the ease with which one could reach places in which one felt secure and remote. Those hills between Alexandrovats and Trstenik, a few miles across and less than fifteen hundred feet high, were as lonely as the top of the Kopaonik, and barer than Snowdon. With the snow on the ground, not even the sheep were grazing, and only occasionally one met a solitary peasant, swinging along with the aid of a staff, his head wrapped in a thick woolly scarf. Winter-time, for the peasants, was chiefly one of leisure and boredom. They stayed indoors, for there was nothing to take them out.

A few miles from Trstenik we came, in the afternoon, to the first of Gorditch's villages. Outside one of the larger houses Stanimir stopped.

'Chicha!' he called, 'Chika Milan!'

The Serbs have a great respect for age. They address all their old men as 'chicha', which is a term of respect, and if they call them by name they preface it with 'chika'. Children often called me Chika Krsta, which I liked better than Gospodine Krsta or Gospodine Kapitane, for it gave me a sense of being one of them, and of being accepted among them. Serbian children are the most respectful and obedient of any. Another delightful custom they have is that of kissing their elders' hands. When I had learnt it, I endeared myself to more than one old Serbian lady by paying her this respect.

Chika Milan was a delightful old man. He had a cheerful, wrinkled red face, and very sparkling blue eyes. When Stanimir had explained who I was he turned to me at once and asked:

'And how *is* Chicha?'

'Chicha?' I repeated.

'Keserovitch,' whispered Stanimir. 'He is a legend here.'

'Ah, Chicha,' I replied. 'He is as well as ever, of course.'

Chika Milan went off into a series of wicked and conspiratorial chuckles.

Chika Milan's son was one of Bogdan's chetniks. He knew me, because he had come up to Kriva Reka, on Bogdan's behalf, to deliver wheat. I was surprised at the respect which he paid me. It was the respect of an amateur for a professional. It was as though he thought that my role, as an outlaw, was the more glorious, and that I was playing the greater part towards our common end—to outwit and rid ourselves of the Germans. Chicha and his son recounted endless tales of Keserovitch's bravery, boldness, and ingenuity. Most of these tales were patently untrue, but I did not think it was my place to say so.

Their village was far enough from Keserovitch's country not to have felt the weight of his requisitions. What supplies they had sent him, they had sent willingly, and those supplies, thanks to Gorditch's foresight, entailed no sacrifice. Nevertheless, it was pleasant to be treated as they treated me, and it gave me greater confidence that the life I had been leading might, after all, have been justifiable.

From Chika Milan's house we continued our journey by pony and trap, which the old man lent us.

'If we pass Germans,' said Stanimir, 'just take no notice of them, as though it were the most usual thing. They are used to seeing Gorditch's chetniks dressed as we are, and will assume you are one of them. You had better take off your spectacles, though, because they do not go very well with your beard. They make you look unusual.'

We bowled through Trstenik, and over the Morava bridge, without incident.

Ljubostenje was a prosperous monastery, much larger than Blagovestenje. It was about three miles from Trstenik, on the north bank of the Morava. Three large, white buildings formed three sides of a square, and the fourth had a high stone wall. The roofs were of decorative tiling, red and green, and, in the middle of the largest building there was a belfry. We passed through the gate unchallenged, for the sentry knew Stanimir.

Gorditch and I were surprised to find that we already knew each other by sight, for he had been with Kosta Pechanats in Guberevats when I had first become a chetnik. He was a foxy little man, a typical merchant, with horn-rimmed spectacles even larger than mine. He was charming. He gave me clean clothing and several pairs of socks, all of which, I reflected, had been bought with German money. He asked me if I needed money. I glanced at Stanimir for a clue, and he nodded violently behind Bogdan's back.

'Well,' I said deprecatingly, 'I have none.'

Bogdan immediately took out his wallet, and gave me 5,000 dinars.

We dined that night in the refectory, with the monks and Bogdan's officers. The food was a contrast to any I had eaten in Jugoslavia. It was richer than that at the best houses into which I had been. For the first time I ate fish caught in the Morava. To my surprise, we were waited on by nuns. This is one of the peculiarities of Serbian Orthodox monasteries. In several of them I found monks and nuns together.

During the meal, the monk who was seated opposite me asked from what part I came. This is a customary opening gambit of polite Serbian conversation, but Stanimir gave me a violent kick on the shin, and shook his head slightly.

'I am not local,' I replied, as coldly as I could.

Afterwards, Stanimir told me that very few of the people who frequented the monastery knew quite to what extent Bogdan was helping the forces of resistance.

After supper, Gorditch asked me: 'Do you mind if you share a room? I have a very old friend of mine, a rich merchant from Bosnia, staying here, and I have no other bed to offer you.'

As it was a luxury to me at that time to sleep between sheets, I was pleased to accept. My room-mate was a fat, well-groomed man of about fifty, and the conversation we had before we fell asleep will always stay in my memory.

'You are English?' he asked me.

'Yes,' I replied.

'Good. You will be able to tell me—will the war end soon? It is very bad for business, and, besides, it is inconvenient, the difficulties there are now in travelling about the country.'

'What is your business?' I asked.

'I sell wood. I own a very large forest in Bosnia.'

'Will not the Germans buy your wood?'

'Of course. But they do not offer me a very good price. Besides, it is against my conscience to sell it to them. They would use it for winning the war. If I could be sure that they would use it for some other purpose, I would sell it to them. But in order not to, I have given instructions that no more shall be cut until the war is over. Except, of course, for firewood. I get a very good price for firewood. But it is a pity that my conscience is so bad about selling wood to the Germans, because the prices keep on going up.'

After a pause he asked me what my trade was, and I told him, journalism.

'Ah, then,' he said, 'you must write in the newspapers in England that the wood of Bosnia is some of the best in the world. Why do not you English buy your wood from Jugoslavia? You are too conservative in your business. It is very good wood, and very cheap. Does not your newspaper need wood for pulp? Why do you not tell your editor to buy his wood from Jugoslavia? It is very good wood, and, after all, we are your allies.'

I murmured something about the war, and how we had more pressing needs. 'The first thing is', I said, 'to beat the Germans.'

'But you must not beat them too much,' said my friend. 'Before the war, they used to buy all my wood from me. They and the Italians. But now, it is against my conscience to sell it to them, especially because the price they offer is so bad at the moment. It makes me very sad, because I am not happy when I am not selling wood.'

He talked himself to sleep, and snored like a bear in one of his own forests.

When I bade him good-bye in the morning his last words were: 'Don't forget to tell your editor about the Jugoslav wood.'

'We will not have breakfast here,' said Stanimir, when I met him in the courtyard. 'I am waiting for one of our officers, and when he comes we will go straight off to find Radevitch. He is in a peasant's house about half an hour's walk away.'

We saw, at that moment, Stanimir's friend approaching, and I studied him as he came. Immediately he gave me quite a different impression from the chetniks whom I had so far met. He was a small but squarely built man, with jet-black hair and beard. He was wearing a well-cut jacket, with the black flashes and black-and-gold epaulettes of a lieutenant in the artillery, a *shubara* with an Army badge, and breeches with grey puttees. His face was a strange combination of mischief, ruthlessness, and extreme good humour. From something about his gait it was obvious that he had spent much of his life on horseback. He bore the unmistakable stamp of the professional soldier; he was, indeed, 'bearded like the pard', and in the first few minutes of his conversation I discovered that he was, moreover, 'full of strange oaths'.

'Lieutenant of the Artillery Dimitrije Milenkovitch,' said Stanimir; 'may I introduce the English Captain Krsta Lorents?'

We shook hands warmly. As we walked along the little valley beside the stream on which the monastery stood, Milenkovitch asked me friendly questions about myself.

'How old are you?' he asked, looking at me keenly.

'Twenty-four,' I replied.

'And already a captain? That is an army worth serving in.'

'In wartime only', I said, 'is promotion fast.'

'I am twenty-six,' said Milenkovitch. 'We must serve four years in each rank. I have been a soldier since I was fourteen, when I joined the Academy. I should now be due for promotion to captain, second class, but, of course, there is no chance until we are freed again.'

Radevitch and his staff of three were billeted in a large peasant's house surrounded by elms. The colonel, though not usually a demonstrative man, greeted me warmly, for he remembered me well from our association in the battle of Krushevats. He introduced me to the remaining two members of his staff, Rasha Ivanovitch and Dragomir Lastitch. They were neither of them professional soldiers. Rasha was a journalist, and I subsequently learned that he was one of the most promising of Jugoslav writers of the younger generation. He was about thirty-three at the time we met, dark, with an intelligent face and the address of a man of culture. He spoke both German and Bulgarian perfectly. His black hair was parted and brushed sleekly away from a high forehead, and his features were good and regular. He had an immense fund of gaiety, and was always on top of events.

Lastitch was tall and red-headed, and always carried one of the long, reconstructed rifles of Russian pattern which had come from the Partisan factory at Uzhitsa. He was a gloomy man, but it was not until long after that I found out that his preoccupation sprang from having something perpetually on his mind. He had been a Partisan, and in command of a section of twenty-five men. The whole formation had been taken prisoner by the Germans. On their way to prison he alone had escaped, and the rest of the section had all been shot. He could not rid himself of the obsession that he ought to have remained with them and taken what was coming. In civilian life he had been a schoolmaster, and a member of the Communist Party. But he was willing to sink his political differences, at least temporarily, a thing that was rare among communists.

There was, among this staff, an enthusiasm which had not been apparent anywhere else, and it seemed to me to be based on a greater self-confidence, a self-confidence which sprang from an intelligent appreciation of the situation. Their manners were better and their conversation more intelligent and more easily understandable than that of any other group of Serbs with whom I had been in contact.

Both Milenkovitch and Ivanovitch had been until recently with Drazha's staff, and they told me their history as his officers. Milenkovitch, when the Germans had attacked Jugoslavia, had been in command of a battery of artillery on the Italian frontier. The day after the attack, everything in his sector being quiet, he had gone down into a Slovenian town in front of his position, and had found the peasants proceeding, as usual, with their market.

'Don't you know that the war has started?' he asked them. 'You ought not to be still in the streets. We might have to start firing at any moment.'

'Yes,' said the peasants, 'but, Gospodine Poruchnitche, the Italians have withdrawn thirty miles, and now you are going to advance for certain. We are out of range of their guns.'

When Milenkovitch found that he was surrounded, and that the Germans had penetrated deep into Jugoslavia, he spiked his guns and set off with the men of his battery southwards across the mountains. He had led them as far as Bosnia, losing only one or two deserters *en route*, before he discovered that the campaign was over, and that the Jugoslav Army had disintegrated. He disbanded them in Bosnia and made his own way back to Belgrade, where he went home.

He found that his father, a high official in the Jugoslav educational service, and more than sixty-five years old, had been taken prisoner. His mother and his sisters had escaped the bombing.

For two months Milenkovitch lived in Belgrade under the German occupation, in feverish inactivity. The city was tight in the grip of the Gestapo. Daily, little knots of Serbs gathered around the Danube bridges to watch the mutilated bodies of their compatriots from Croatia, who had been

murdered and thrown in the water by Pavelitch's *ustasha*, higher up the river.

Milenkovitch pondered as to whether he should join the Partisans, Kosta Pechanats, or Drazha Mihailovitch. He decided to join Mihailovitch because he was a regular officer. He arrived at Mihailovitch's headquarters on the Ravna Gora in August, and was immediately given the task of organizing guerrilla bands in the vicinity of Valjevo. This he did with such success that, by the end of September, he was in command not only of all Drazha's forces there, numbering about two thousand, but also one thousand Partisans who had elected to co-operate with them.

A few days before the start of the revolution, the better part of a division of Germans, motorized but with no armour, arrived in the town. When Uzhitsa fell and Chachak and Kraljevo were invested, this force became the greatest danger to the attacking guerrillas. Milenkovitch received orders from Mihailovitch to keep it in at all costs. He did so, though his losses were heavy. It was not until after the break-up of the revolution that the division eventually broke out, and then they were unopposed.

Meanwhile, Ivanovitch had been playing a different role. During the first months of the occupation, he had started, through his numerous and influential contacts among Serbian politicians of the Left, to form a political organization in Belgrade. By August, it was sufficiently powerful and representative to consider itself worthy of the support of the military guerrilla leaders. Together with a progressive post-war programme, they had worked out a propaganda campaign, calculated to attract Serbs of every persuasion to whichever of the military leaders would condescend to use them.

Ivanovitch, too, chose Mihailovitch, because he thought that Mihailovitch, being a soldier, would appreciate help in a field about which the latter, presumably, knew little. Mihailovitch, on the advice of his officers, all of them avaricious for power, refused to co-operate with Ivanovitch's organization. Ivanovitch, nothing daunted, offered his services as propaganda chief to Mihailovitch, and said that he would carry out whatever policy the latter dictated. But Mihailovitch had no policy, so that Ivanovitch found himself drawing more and more on the one which he had already worked out.

Both Ivanovitch and Milenkovitch fell into bad odour with Mihailovitch when warfare broke out between the Partisans and Mihailovitch's supporters. They both refused outright to fight against men with whom they had until then been comrades, and they left the Ravna Gora together at the time when Mihailovitch had almost succumbed to attack on all sides.

'When the attacks on Kraljevo and Kragujevats failed, and Chachak and Gornje Milanovats were retaken,' said Milenkovitch, after they had both told me their histories, 'Drazha was in a difficult position. In order to save the lives of his men, and preserve the skeleton of an organization, he was forced to disband most of his companies. Those of the men who could go home, went. Many others he sent to serve nominally under the Germans in the companies which Neditch was raising to fight against the Partisans and against Drazha himself.'

'But,' I said, 'does that mean that they are now serving under the Germans?'

'In fact, it does,' said Milenkovitch, 'though Drazha did not intend that it should. His idea was to preserve himself and a certain number of his companies. If he had maintained them illegally, as he did before, they would have been cut to pieces by the Partisans and the Germans. He meant that they should serve with Neditch's militia long enough to get arms and clothing, and then escape again to the woods and hills.'

'Are they still serving with Neditch?' I asked.

'Some of them are,' said Milenkovitch; 'far too many. It was a good idea when Drazha thought of it, and provided it could have been carried out as he intended. But we believe that far too many of them have stayed.'

'How could it have been a good idea?' I insisted.

'Because it provided Mihailovitch with groups of men whom he could use for his defence against the Partisans, if

they attacked, and who also kept him informed about German intentions. He always knows when they are to attack, and in what direction, because they always use a screen of Neditch's men as advance guard. And more than half of the men they use are, in fact, Drazha's own.'

'But you said that it had now ceased to be a good idea. Why is that?' I asked.

'Because hundreds of officers and men, having taken no part in the fighting in the autumn, but having had vague connections with us, have heard that some of Drazha's officers have been sent into Neditch's militia, and have of their own accord joined, without orders. Drazha has, in fact, no control over them, and yet they do whatever they do in his name, and often openly collaborate with the Germans. It compromises him and gives him a bad name with the peasants.'

'Even that,' interjected Ivanovitch, 'would not be so bad if Drazha were to repudiate them. But he is so short of men, except in places like Valjevo and the Ravna Gora, that he accepts almost anybody. Did you know that Priest Mika of Blatse had opened negotiations with him before he was killed?'

This new light on Mihailovitch gave me many things to think about. I could not understand it. The British radio was still daily proclaiming that Mihailovitch was the accredited leader of all Jugoslav guerrillas. I had enough faith in the British intelligence service to accept this at its face value. I presumed that the British must know everything that Mihailovitch was doing, and had given their approval. Mihailovitch's order, after his defeat in the autumn, to stop fighting the Germans, seemed reasonable enough, for one cannot fight effectively until one's organization is powerful enough. But this new development seemed, on the face of it, inexplicable.

Most of my first journey to Drazha Mihailovitch's headquarters was done on foot, and it took us only as far as Gornje Milanovats. We had to move fast, as Stanimir had made a rendezvous with Radevitch on the south bank of the Morava, which would leave us only ten days to complete the journey. After that, Radevitch intended to set out immediately to Toplitsa to start work there. The first part of the journey took us over a high mountain, rocky and wooded. While we walked I questioned Stanimir further about Radevitch, Milenkovitch, and Ivanovitch.

'If they are in bad odour with Mihailovitch,' I asked, 'why has he appointed them to the work they are to do?'

'He has not,' said Stanimir. 'They left the Ravna Gora in disgrace, and arrived at Ljubostenje *in extremis.* They told Gorditch that they were officers of Drazha Mihailovitch, and he took them in without question, for he knew Milenkovitch by reputation. Radevitch and I were already there, and we had no plans for the future. Ivanovitch comes from Toplitsa—his father is still a rich peasant there. It was he who propounded the plan that we should go and organize the province in Drazha's name. Drazha must not know until the organization is formed, who are the members of Radevitch's staff.'

I said nothing, and Stanimir continued: 'There was, at first, a very serious complication. We had announced to Gorditch that we were about to become Drazha's representatives in Toplitsa, but had not yet contacted Drazha about it, when he himself appointed somebody else—a major called Dragomir Vasitch. Worse, this officer—a brigand if ever there was one—also arrived at Ljubostenje and asked for Gorditch's help. Ivanovitch soon fixed him.'

'You mean, he murdered him?' I asked, for by this time I was sufficiently versed in guerrilla politics always to expect the worst.

Stanimir laughed. 'It was not necessary,' he said. 'Vasitch is a poltroon. Ivanovitch told him terrible tales of how the whole of Toplitsa was terrorized by the Partisans. He said that those parts of Toplitsa which were not terrorized by the Partisans were under the thrall of Kosta Pechanats's chetniks. When he thought he had frightened him enough he suggested that he (Ivanovitch) and Milenkovitch should go to Toplitsa and investigate the situation. Vasitch agreed.

'Ivanovitch and Milenkovitch went to Toplitsa, where

they spent a very pleasant few days with Ivanovitch's father. They invited the political commissar of Zakitch's Partisans to have lunch with them. They then came back, with their clothes all torn and a bullet hole in Milenkovitch's *shubara,* and declared that nothing would ever induce them to go back to Toplitsa again. Vasitch was so frightened that he went back to Drazha Mihailovitch and told him that he thought that Toplitsa was not suitable for organization.

'At about the same time Mihailovitch received Keserovitch's report and appointed *him* commandant of most of Toplitsa. We had purposely not put our plan to Mihailovitch because we wanted some time to elapse between Vasitch's arrival and ours. Now that we have done so, Mihailovitch is only too willing to appoint Radevitch to the command of the whole of Toplitsa, if we can placate Keserovitch.'

Stanimir also told me how sedulously Gorditch had shielded them from German curiosity. Twice the Germans had carried out a search of Trstenik and its surroundings, and, on one occasion, Radevitch and his staff, dressed as Gorditch's chetniks, had helped them look.

Their presence had originally been given away by a girl to whom Milenkovitch had made love and whom he had suddenly and heartlessly jilted.

Stanimir Radenkovitch and I crossed the main Kraljevo—Kragujevats road not far from Guberevats. From now on, said Stanimir, the journey would be difficult, because the country was more thickly populated. At Knitch, a large village about four or five miles to the north of Guberevats, we found a complete company of Drazha Mihailovitch's men masquerading as Neditch's militia. They were commanded by a Captain Smilijanitch, who was obviously ill at ease in his new role.

'As soon as the Germans have provided us with new rifles and kit,' he told me, 'we shall take to the woods and become illegal again, which is greatly preferable. Besides, if the communists were to attack us I would sooner be in the right than in the wrong, and, while we are accepting pay from the

Germans under any pretext, the communists would be quite justified in attacking us.'

'Do you intend any action against the communists?' I asked.

'Only if they attack us first, as they did last year. And even if they attacked me at the present moment, I think I should take to the hills rather than fight against them. I could not agree to do anything that I thought would help the Germans and make me a collaborator in the eyes of the peasants.'

'But aren't you that already?'

'No, because they realize that, while we are here, the Germans will not come to the village to "maintain order". But the moment we took any action against the Partisans we should immediately become fifth-columnists, although the Partisans are not popular in these parts.'

'And how long do you intend to remain "legal" in the eyes of the Germans?' I asked.

'Two of my officers have taken a patrol into Kragujevats to pick up some boxes of ammunition. As soon as they have brought them, I shall leave this part of the country altogether, and make for Tsrna Gora. There the mountains are higher, and the country is more suitable for maintaining guerrilla warfare.'

'What about the families of your men and officers?' I asked.

'When the men registered as members of the militia, they all gave false names and places of origin, and the records are in such confusion that it will take months for the Germans to find this out. By the time they do, we shall have gone. The officers are different. They have had to move their families out of the towns into villages where we hope they will be safe. But the risk always has to be taken.'

It seemed a good plan to me.

Smilijanitch's company, every one of whom had served under him in the attacks on Gornje Milanovats and Kragujevats, was the best-disciplined and most soldierly I saw during the whole of my stay in Jugoslavia. The men saluted their officers, and the officers saluted each other. Beards and hair were trimmed, and, if men were clean-shaven, they were properly so. The officers all wore their peacetime uniforms. These too were the only guerrillas, except my own platoon, who ever cleaned their rifles. The average guerrilla has a rifle barrel through which the light hardly shines, and I have seen many rifles with which I would scarcely dare to shoot. But one of Smilijanitch's officers inspected the men's arms every day, and the result was that they were in a fairly presentable condition.

We stayed at Knitch a whole day, in order to discover if the road was clear to Gornje Milanovats, and I made a reputation among the officers of the company by winning several hundred dinars at poker, and a primitive form of baccarat which I had learned from Keserovitch's men. The Serbs play poker extremely cautiously, and are not very good at concealing the strength of their hands. When they do bluff, they do so in such a grandiose way that one can usually call it. Smilijanitch and his officers changed to baccarat, I think, in an attempt to win back what they had lost, but I had a lucky day.

Stanimir and I finished the journey to Gornje Milanovats on horses provided by Smilijanitch.

My only previous view of Milanovats had been from the heights of the Rudnik, when I was with Novakovitch, and I have already described it as it then appeared. Now, as we rode in, I was consumed with anger. I had seen Kanea, on Crete, seemingly irreparably damaged by dive-bombers, and I had seen the area round St. Paul's Cathedral, in London, after the great fire raid of September 1940. But here was a town which had been wantonly, almost totally, destroyed.

The yellow houses on each side of the cobbled streets were just blackened shells, with gaping windows and roofs that had fallen in. It was like a town of the dead. The streets were almost deserted. We arrived on what had been market-day, but there were not more than a hundred or so peasants, who had come, not so much to sell their goods, for there was nobody left to buy them, as to exchange gloomy gossip with their friends.

Occasionally there was a house which had been only slightly damaged, and which the owners had managed to patch up. But, of the original forty or fifty thousand inhabitants, there remained scarcely two or three thousand.

Having done their worst, the Germans now seldom came near the town, since it was not on any main road. And, since his escape from Ravna Gora, Drazha Mihailovitch had used it as one of his main organizing centres. The staff headquarters was in the cellar of a building which had been little damaged, and which contained a small factory for Turkish delight. Only a tiny part of the factory was still working, for lack of ingredients, but the owner still made several boxes every day. We spent the night in his house, and Drazha Mihailovitch's officers sent men to take care of our horses.

Stanimir presented his dispatches overnight, and in the morning was called for an interview with Drazha's Chief of Staff. At the same time I was introduced to Major Djuritch, the celebrated commander of the joint forces who had attacked Kraljevo with such bravery, if lack of success, and under whom I had served without ever meeting him. Again, I was greatly struck by the difference between these men and Keserovitch's officers. They were quieter, more determined, and seemed to have a much greater sense of responsibility and a less exalted opinion of their own importance. They told me that Drazha Mihailovitch was no longer in the vicinity of Ravna Gora and Gornje Milanovats, but was several days' march away, establishing a new headquarters from which he could operate his radio communications with Cairo. I inquired after Captain X and they told me that he was with him. I said that my main object in having made this journey was to talk with X, and they advised me to wait until I had seen the Chief of Staff, whose name was Ostojitch, and who had also arrived with X's mission from Cairo.

Ostojitch was an impressive man with a black moustache, whose first question was, what did I want to do.

I told him that my primary intention in escaping had

been to make my way back to neutral territory, and that this still remained my ambition. Meanwhile, because I realized that it would be difficult to make such a move until the summer, I was willing to be used by Drazha Mihailovitch in whatever capacity he found most useful. But this did not include being a member of a force of guerrillas who did more or less nothing and lived in extreme discomfort on the top of a mountain.

'Our task at the moment,' said Ostojitch, 'is one of organization. The total result of our revolution was that we killed about seven or eight thousand Germans, and lost 125,000 men and women shot by them. Three towns and fifty-three villages in this part of the country alone were burned out, and our organization was virtually destroyed.

'We are now rebuilding it on different lines. We wish to create a secret army of men who will continue to live in their homes and hide their weapons until we call upon them. Any action which we undertake must have a definite objective. Sabotage is our aim, and it must be so arranged that subsequent reparations, if they are possible at all, will be kept small.'

Ostojitch went on to say that Keserovitch had claimed that he had such an organization in five provinces, including the two most westerly of Toplitsa. He asked me whether or not I thought such a claim was justified.

'No,' I replied, after thought. 'There is no doubt that he has complete control over Brus and Alexandrovats. But, as far as I know, very few of his patrols have ever been to Toplitsa, and then only in search of food. As for Krushevats, I know he has a number of agents in the town, but to what extent he could organize the population for your purpose, I am doubtful. He himself is so well known that it would be dangerous for him to move very far afield, with or without his men.'

Ostojitch then told me that he had already had similar reports from other people. He was, he said, giving to Radevitch command of Toplitsa. His orders would be, not to raise a permanent force, but to create an organization from which an emergency force could be drawn when necessary.

Ostojitch pointed out that Toplitsa was at the moment torn between the Partisans and Kosta Pechanats, who were both strong. There were also, he said, several companies of Neditch's militia, about which he knew nothing.

'Stanimir Radenkovitch', said Ostojitch, 'has told me that you might like to work with Radevitch, at least for the time being. We should be happy for you to go with him.'

I asked Ostojitch for the British officer who was with Drazha Mihailovitch, and Ostojitch told me that he was not, for the moment, in a place where I could see him.

'As soon as we are more settled,' he said, 'you will be able to make a special journey to headquarters to find him.'

I left headquarters in high spirits. Even the thought that I had seen neither X nor Drazha Mihailovitch could not take away from me the pleasure of the prospect of being implicated in yet another phase of the Balkan resistance movement. Stanimir too was in high spirits.

It was the end of February, and there was a sudden thaw. The roads, from being covered thick in frozen snow, had become inches deep in mud. We were glad of our horses, but the going was so difficult that it took us two days to reach Knitch. In one village we had to stay overnight, because the River Gruzha had become a torrent—I remembered it as a little stream in which Ron Jones and I had shaved on the first day after our escape—and we were afraid to put the horses through it in case they should be swept away.

At Knitch, Smilijanitch was a different man.

'Back to the woods,' he said. 'Now, for the first time since the autumn, I am really happy. New guns, new clothes, and plenty of ammunition. Those Italians have got something coming to them.' He rubbed his hands in glee.

Stanimir was worried over the time we had taken.

'We must make Trstenik to-night,' he said. 'We'll walk along the railway to Gruzha, and from there use the main road.'

That day we covered a record distance—seventy-three kilometres from Knitch to Trstenik. Stanimir and I argued violently, for he would not stop for food.

On the outskirts of Trstenik, Gorditch's outposts would not let us go on. Trstenik was full of Germans. For the third time they had arrived to search for Milenkovitch and Radevitch. This time they were too late. Radevitch had already moved across the Morava, and was waiting in Chika Milan's village on the south bank. Stanimir and I crossed by night, in a small boat.

Our host called us at about four in the morning. It was getting light. We passed through the village, the mud squelching under our boots. There was no moon, and no sound could be heard above the barking of the village dogs. You cannot pass silently through a Serbian village at night, because all the dogs bark. The peasants are so used to it that nobody even looks out of the window.

The Morava at Trstenik is about seventy yards wide. When we crossed it was swollen by the thaw, fast-running, brown and menacing. It looked very cold, and there were huge pieces of frozen snow floating by.

Our boat was a flat-bottomed punt, hidden in the undergrowth overhanging the stream. There were willows and briars growing down to the water's edge, and the banks were marshy. There were no oars in the boat, and we had to propel it with a spade. For every yard we made across the river, the current carried us five yards downstream.

In midstream the chetnik who was in charge of the boat said: 'The Germans have handed over Trstenik to the Bulgarians. They are coming there to occupy it.'

'That will please Gorditch,' said Stanimir.

'The Bulgars are better than the Germans,' said the chetnik. 'They do leave you alone. And one thing is certain, they will never ask us to fight for them, because they don't fight.'

Once across the river, we walked the few miles to Chika Milan's village, and arrived at his house for breakfast. Milenkovitch and Ivanovitch were lying in bed singing at the top of their voices. Radevitch was cleaning his rifle. Dragomir Lastitch gave the impression of not having been to bed. He was sitting at the end of a long table, in a large, whitewashed room. He was in a dream.

Milenkovitch and Ivanovitch, as they sang, were composing new words to 'Lili Marlene':

> Tu, ispred Moskve, ispred vrata bash
> Sneg sa vetrom pada, predznag sloma vash—
> Hajde, padaj zavej tle,
> Nek' Hitler plati s' glavom sve
> Što pre, što pre, što pre.

These words later became one of the songs most renowned throughout all elements of resistance in Jugoslavia, Partisans and chetniks alike. That morning the two staff officers composed between them seven or eight verses.

While Stanimir and Radevitch discussed Stanimir's news, Milenkovitch, Ivanovitch, and I went out into Milan's vineyard, and they told me some of their plans.

The snow, except in occasional hollows, had quite gone. A fortnight before, as I had passed, it had still been a foot thick everywhere. Now the fields were brown and green, and one could bask in the spring sunshine. Below us, along the valley, the white houses sparkled. Not far away a man was ploughing with a wooden ploughshare, urging his oxen with deep, sharp cries. He was turning the earth to a depth of about six inches, and working hard to keep the blade upright in the steep ground. A little girl was leading the oxen.

'I want you to understand immediately', said Ivanovitch, 'that we owe no especial loyalty to Drazha Mihailovitch.'

'Are you,' I asked, 'in fact, a communist?'

'No,' said Ivanovitch. 'I have never been a communist. But I am an enemy of the present regime, though a personal friend of the King.'

He took out of his wallet some photos of himself and the young King bathing together on the Dalmatian coast.

'Tell me,' I said, 'has Mihailovitch really a strong following all over the country?'

'Theoretically, yes, practically, no,' said Milenkovitch.

'It is the British radio which has given him his reputation, almost entirely,' said Ivanovitch. 'Except in those places where his men fought in the autumn—in Shumadija and here, and to a certain extent in Bosnia, under Dangitch—

men have only heard of him through the radio. You will find, in fact, that many will not believe that he is a real man, even in Toplitsa.'

I could not see, in that case, why we must work in Mihailovitch's name, but Milenkovitch explained.

It was the legend which surrounded Mihailovitch's name, he said, which would make our hand strong. The people would flock to us. Had I not observed how loyal they were to the idea of the monarchy and the Allies? That very loyalty would bind them to us. The majority of them would serve neither with the Partisans nor with Kosta Pechanats's chetniks—with the former because they wished to dispose of the monarchy, with the latter because their reputation was unsavoury, thanks to men like Mika the Priest and Mashan Djurovitch.

'But how do you begin?' I asked. 'You cannot just advertise yourselves, nor can you move about among villages infested with chetniks and Partisans.'

'The first essential is to neutralize them,' said Milenkovitch. 'We must make friends with them both.'

'But you cannot openly make friends with Kosta Pechanats,' I said. 'That would be collaboration.'

'Subtlety,' said Ivanovitch, 'that is the thing. We shall tell the chetniks that there is no difference which matters between ourselves and them—that our one difference is that they co-operate with the Germans to fight the Partisans, and we fight them on our own. We shall offer to collaborate with them at every turn, whereas in fact we shall co-operate with them not at all. One day they will wake up to the fact that we are much too strong for them, and then we shall destroy them.'

'And the communists?' I asked.

'The communists', said Ivanovitch, 'will have nothing to fear from us. With them we can work, but we shall eventually be their masters. Toplitsa is a rich peasant country, and there are very few communists in it. Zakitch at his strongest was never so strong as Stanimir and Radevitch when they had their company. Now Zakitch is dead, and many of his men. His company is commanded by Boginja. As soon as our organization is strong enough, I shall go to them and tell them that our connection with Mihailovitch is only nominal, as it will, in fact, be. I am sufficiently well known in the country as a writer of articles with a socialistic outlook to be able to command their confidence.'

'But this organization'—I insisted—'what sort of an organization will it be?'

'In Toplitsa,' said Ivanovitch, 'all the best men have taken neither one side nor the other. They have kept clear of Pechanats because they regard his men, rightly, as bands of robbers and fifth-columnists; and they will have nothing to do with the communists. Among them, we shall make a purely political organization. In each village we shall create a cell, directed by three men whom we shall choose. They will be men of property, for the village will follow them, where it would not listen to, say, the schoolmaster. This cell will be the nucleus through which we shall disseminate propaganda and instructions. When the political structure is complete, and we have our representatives in every village, we shall start to build our military organization. This we shall do purely on paper. Each village will have a section or a platoon, according to its size. The men will remain at home and work their land until we need them. And at the end of every action they will return home. The time is past when without help from outside we can, in this part of the country, maintain large illegal companies, and at the same time remain popular.'

This was the broad outline of the scheme which we later put into effect. Many of the details remained to be worked out, and the methods by which we worked were often haphazard and unnecessarily risky. But we kept the end always in view.

That evening I was initiated into a totally new sort of poker—a mad game in which everybody bluffed everybody else, and vast sums of money changed hands, and were afterwards shared out again. Stanimir, Ivanovitch, and Milenkovitch were the only Serbs I ever knew, apart from Rade and Sima, who were willing to share with each other everything they had.

Next morning, when we started, rather late, for Keserovitch's headquarters at Kriva Reka, I was surprised again. Used as I was to Keserovitch's forced marches and Stanimir's perpetual hurry, I was unprepared for the light-hearted ease with which Radevitch's staff, when you found them all together, took their journeys. Ivanovitch was a townsman, and not ashamed to admit it, while Milenkovitch was one of those horsemen who profess scorn for all other means of transport, and place walking lowest on the list. These two very quickly tired, and as soon as they were tired they sat down. Once they were sitting down, it took Radevitch in one of his sternest moods to get them on their feet again. We took two days over the journey to the Kopaonik, which Stanimir and I had covered with ease in less than a single day. On the way, I remember, Ivanovitch talked entertainingly of everyday life in Jugoslavia before the war.

'There was grinding poverty,' he said in answer to a question from me, 'but no real starvation. There was enough food produced for twice the population. If you could beg seven dinars a day, you had enough to live on.'

There was, he added, nevertheless, a grossly unfair distribution of wealth, though the cost of living was less than half that, for instance, in Germany. A farm labourer was paid ten dinars (a shilling) a day.

'How much does a journalist earn?' I asked.

'An ordinary journalist, about five thousand dinars a month,' replied Ivanovitch, 'an excellent journalist, nine thousand, and there were one or two brilliant men, at the top of their profession, who earned anything up to fifteen thousand.'

'How much did you earn?' I asked.

'About fifteen thousand dinars,' replied Ivanovitch, seriously.

'In this part of the world,' I said, as we approached the Kopaonik, 'you have to be careful where you sleep. Any bed which has, at any time, been occupied by one of Keserovitch's men will now be full of lice.'

'Are there any peasants around whose houses are not frequented by them?' asked Milenkovitch.

'I don't know of any,' I replied. But Stanimir, of course, knew one.

Radevitch, Stanimir, and I went straight up the long climb which would take us to Kriva Reka, while Ivanovitch and Milenkovitch went to prepare the peasant for our reception.

Keserovitch made a great show of being delighted to see me back again, and immediately assumed that I was to stay. Disillusioning him was unpleasant, for he was an uncultured man, and could not stand not getting his own way. Besides, on his own mountain, he was a dictator, or reckoned to be. Rade and Sima, who were genuinely pleased to see me, told me that Keserovitch had recently shot two of his men for disobedience, one of them with his own hand.

But I was confident that he would not yet dare to shoot me, and stood up to him on this occasion for the first time, for in the past few weeks I had begun to see him in his proper light. I knew that thereafter I could expect only the minimum of help from him.

While I had been away he had been involved in two skirmishes—one with troops of Mashan Djurovitch, out on patrol in this area, and the other with his old enemy 'the Stork'.

His brush with 'the Stork' had put him in bad odour with respectable people in all the countryside around, for he had accomplished nothing, and had acted like a brigand.

'The Stork's' rule of Alexandrovats, under the German aegis, had become more and more dictator-like, and less and less public-spirited. He had carried out all the German requisition orders with something more than enthusiasm, and on each occasion had collected from the peasants half as much again as had been demanded of them. The surplus he had appropriated and stored in his own house near Krushevats. In the face of Keserovitch, he had become bolder and bolder, for he had a sufficiently good intelligence system to know that Keserovitch, though he had added numerically to his company, was very little better off than he had been three or four months earlier, after the battle of Kraljevo. The crowning incident had come when he had detained one

of Keserovitch's couriers, whom he took in Alexandrovats, and given him a beating which kept him in his bed for several weeks.

Keserovitch then marched on Alexandrovats, with the avowed intention of disarming the whole of 'the Stork's' band, and executing 'the Stork' himself. The opening stages of the action were carried out with great secrecy and efficiency, and overnight Keserovitch and his men arrived near Alexandrovats, without anybody knowing that they had moved.

But the well-stocked wine-cellars of the district proved their undoing. While they were waiting for zero hour, almost the whole company, with the exception of a few veterans like Rade Chirakovitch, got drunk. By the time the hour for attack arrived, they were incapable of carrying out any co-ordinated action. 'The Stork' escaped capture by hiding in a lavatory, and most of his men fled, taking their arms with them. 'The Stork's' brother, who had the reputation of keeping a firm hand over his excesses, openly confronted Keserovitch, and tried to dissuade him from looting the houses of those citizens of the town whom he suspected of co-operation with 'the Stork'.

Keserovitch had him shot out of hand. There were two other deaths among the citizens of Alexandrovats, but neither of the men who were killed had in any way been implicated with 'the Stork'.

Keserovitch did disarm a certain number of the chetniks, but, generally, the operation was not a success, except in his own eyes, and those of Popovitch and Radiuje, the pilot. The countryside around had a rude eye-opener as to the discipline and quality of his troops.

I was glad that I had been absent while all this was happening, and expected that Drazha Mihailovitch would not take a happy view of the incident.

That evening, Radevitch's staff forgathered several miles from Keserovitch's headquarters, in the house of Stanimir's friend Moskovljevitch. Moskovljevitch was a young man, the youngest of the sons of a very rich peasant, who had died and left a considerable patrimony, The old man had taken precautions against the Jugoslav laws of heredity, and prevented the holding from being split up. He had educated all but one of his sons in various professions. One was a priest, and two others lawyers. The daughters had both completed university and were teachers in high schools. The youngest son had been trained in modern methods of agriculture and had remained on the farm.

He was an acute young man, and immediately realized that Ivanovitch and Milenkovitch were not of the usual run of guerrillas. He entertained us royally, and the *rakija* flowed. We all got noisy, but none of us was drunk. I was pleased to note that Radevitch hardly drank at all—the first guerrilla leader whom I ever saw refuse a glass of *rakija*.

In fairness to the Partisans I ought here to add that, in the early days, all their members were forbidden to drink. Discipline on this point was very strict, and they were self-righteous about it, like old-fashioned Methodists.

# VIII

Our journey to Toplitsa was carried on at the same leisurely pace at which we had started. We had acquired a guide from Keserovitch. This was a gross man called Bozha, who had been a Government forester over a large area of Toplitsa, and knew both the country and its people. His cowardice was notorious. Before the battle of Kraljevo he had been considered for the command of one of Keserovitch's platoons, but, on the eve of the first action, he had mysteriously disappeared. He came back when the battle was over, and said that he had had a continuous stomach-ache which had prevented him from taking part in it. . . .

We avoided Blatse by going over the mountains, and in two days arrived in a remote part of our new territory, near the Albanian frontier. (The Germans had pushed the Albanian frontier more than a hundred kilometres to the north and east.)

There was still snow on the tops of the mountains, and, in the clouds, it was fresh and cold, like an April morning; but in the valleys the bushes were already beginning to bud. The River Toplitsa, near its source, flows between steep banks, and is clear and fast. We crossed it, and struck into the hills towards the south-east.

Milenkovitch and Ivanovitch argued like children about their plans, and were careful to tell me that I must on no account pass on to Radevitch and Stanimir many of the things they said.

Radevitch had risen from the ranks during the Great War. He was a simple man, with a very fierce loyalty for the King, and a straightforward hatred of Kosta Pechanats. Ivanovitch had therefore not revealed to him much of the plan for 'neutralizing' the forces of Pechanats, and, of his intention to co-operate completely with the communists, he had said nothing at all.

'What we shall do', said Ivanovitch to me, 'is to dig ourselves in so securely that we can sit on the fence until one side or the other dominates completely—either the Partisans or Drazha Mihailovitch. But long before that we shall have completely liquidated Kosta Pechanats.'

At another time Milenkovitch said: 'The Partisans are potentially a more efficient force against the Germans than Drazha. They are more ruthless, and their organization is more widely spread. At the moment, the support which Mihailovitch receives from Britain makes him appear strong. But obviously, as the tide in Russia turns, the Russians will also support one or other of the organizations, and more likely the Partisans. It remains to be seen whether, in that case, the English will continue their support for Drazha. The Partisans are making good use in their propaganda of the co-operation of Drazha's men with Neditch.'

'On the other hand,' said Ivanovitch, 'there is an equal likelihood that, with British aid, Drazha will establish himself so strongly that the Russians will have to support him too.'

'What you want, in fact, to do', I said, in exasperation, 'is to run with the hare and hunt with the hounds.'

'A very good metaphor,' said Ivanovitch. 'That is exactly what we are doing. When it becomes finally known who is to lead the country, we can follow.'

'How can you, when you will already have told the peasants that you receive your orders from Drazha Mihailovitch?' I retorted.

Both Milenkovitch and Ivanovitch looked at me in bland surprise.

'What we shall have told the peasants is immaterial,' said Milenkovitch. 'The important thing is that, once they have accepted us, they will follow us whatever we order them to do. Why do you think that Kosta Pechanats was able to lead patriots into the towns to fight on the side of the Germans? Loyalty to the person of a leader is the greatest virtue—and the most dangerous—which the Serbs have.'

'But how do you think you can do all these things without Radevitch knowing?'

'No difficulty at all about that,' said Ivanovitch. 'Radevitch is the stupidest man with whom I have ever had to deal. Brave, honest, and very stupid. What you have to do is to persuade him that he has made the suggestion himself, and he will do anything you want.'

'How long will it take before the peasants change in their attitude of following you as Mihailovitch's representative, and follow you for your own sake?' I asked.

'Less than a year,' said Milenkovitch, 'and much less, if we are clever. My peasants at Valjevo did not obey Drazha's orders to fight the Partisans when they knew that I was against it; and I had only known them a few months. Some of them I had never even seen.'

'But where do I come in in all this?' I asked.

'With your help,' replied Ivanovitch, 'our plan is made much easier. The peasants, as you know, love the English. From now on you become, in the eyes of the countryside, the man who directs our policy. You must pretend that you are in contact with England through Drazha. You need not worry that the Germans will ever find you out. The peasants will accept and protect you where they would never accept us. You can go where we cannot.'

'There is another side to that,' added Milenkovitch. 'Once it becomes generally known that you are English, there is not a *vojvoda* in the country who would dare to move against you. You are the one person who has more pull with the peasants than they have. The peasants will trust what you say, because they know that you are the only person—I repeat, the *only* person—who is working disinterestedly. And any *vojvoda* who is the cause of your death or capture by the Germans knows that his days will thereby be numbered. The peasants would kill him. I tell you, you are already better known and liked on the Kopaonik and in Alexandrovats than Keserovitch, and the peasants there are more concerned for your safety than for his. That is why he is so angry at losing you. And we shall not lose time in making use of you here.'

This conversation made me pause, and think. Here I was, apparently being used as a pawn in a semi-political intrigue. I had doubts as to whether I ought to continue with it. But it seemed that, no matter with whom I worked, the same use would be made of me. I admitted to myself that I liked Ivanovitch and Milenkovitch better than any of the leaders whom I had so far met. They were unquestionably working against the Germans. They intended no harm to Mihailovitch as long as the English continued to support him. Therefore, I concluded, to help them was not to harm the English cause. Nevertheless, I resolved that I would be very careful what propaganda I disseminated on their behalf. I did not want to mislead the peasants into thinking that too much of it came from London.

Before we could start to work at all, we had to have a centre where we knew that we could stay for days at a time in safety from arrest by Kosta Pechanats's chetniks. Such a centre proved difficult to find. In the first village to which we came, we found the peasants suspicious. They were, many of them, armed, and nominally under the command of Kosta Pechanats, but, in fact, their only reason for being armed was to protect themselves from bands of Albanians marauding across the border, as they still did occasionally. The summary fixing of the border had hit some of the peasants hard. Many of them had lost fields through it, for nobody was allowed to cross on any pretext. One of them told us that he had three hay-ricks on the other side.

'Why don't you fetch them, then?' asked Milenkovitch.

'We dare not, Gospodine,' said the peasant; 'the Albanians would shoot us.'

'Nonsense,' said Milenkovitch. 'How many rifles have you?'

'Sixteen.'

'Then why don't you go with as many wagons as you can muster, in the night, under the screen of your sixteen rifles?'

For the first time in that village I saw a trace of truly Serbian fire, as the man's eyes lit with anticipation at the

thought. But he quickly lapsed into what appeared to be his usual apathy.

'Impossible,' he muttered.

'Tchah!' said Milenkovitch in scorn. And he named that village 'the Village of Cowards', and always afterwards called it that.

The truth was, as Bozha pointed out, that the villages on the border were poor, and even poorer now that they had lost some of their fields and had some of their cattle carried off by the Albanians.

Bozha was pathetically willing to show his worth. He always had a suggestion to make, but was seldom listened to. This time he offered to lead us to a village where, he said, he had friends.

'You surprise me,' said Milenkovitch coldly. 'Have they never found you out?'

We tried two or three villages on the border, but the result of our meetings with their leaders was always the same. They asked us to leave them alone. Drazha Mihailovitch was a mere name to them. All they wanted was to be left in peace with their immediate and ever-pressing problem of wringing a living from the poor mountainsides.

We left them, and turned north-eastward towards Kurshumlje.

'Now this village,' said Bozha, when we were on the top of a mountain at night-time, with not a building in sight, 'this village will be quite different.'

'We have heard that before,' said Milenkovitch.

'In this village', said Bozha humbly, 'there is a *vojvoda* who is a peasant . . .'

'All *vojvode* are peasants,' said Milenkovitch rudely.

'Let the man finish,' said Radevitch.

'. . . who will not have anything to do with Kosta Pechanats. He refuses to fight the communists.'

'In what village?' asked Ivanovitch. 'I see no village.'

'I assure you, gentlemen,' said poor Bozha, who felt that his reputation was at stake, 'that we are in the middle of a mountain village. It is called Zhegrova. Soon we shall come to a house.'

'If you are lost,' said Milenkovitch, whose temper was getting worse and worse through marching over mountains with nothing to eat, 'I shall disembowel you. With my hands.'

'Where does the *vojvoda* live?' asked Radevitch patiently.

'Not far from here, Gospodine Colonel,' said Bozha.

'If we do not arrive somewhere within ten minutes,' said Milenkovitch, 'I shall take out your bowels and strangle you with them.'

But Bozha was right. The *vojvoda's* house was tucked in a hollow just out of sight.

We knocked at the door. I was always surprised at the matter-of-fact way in which we could call a man from his bed, and confront him with four or five armed desperadoes, without unduly disturbing his equanimity.

This peasant was a youngish man, big-built and slow-moving. He called his wife and told her to prepare breakfast. Then Radevitch explained who we were. The effect was electric.

'Gentlemen, gentlemen,' said the peasant, with tears in his eyes, 'why have you not come into this part of the world earlier? We have been waiting for you.'

Vukovitch, for that was his name, explained that he had in the village nearly twenty young men who were armed with rifles, and had ammunition for them. They had not undertaken any action, and had stood aloof when the Partisans had taken Kurshumlje.

'Did I do right?' said Vukovitch anxiously. 'I had nobody from whom I could take orders. I did not want to fight against Serbs, although they might have been Partisans.'

'You have done the very thing,' said Radevitch. 'But now, will you take orders from us?'

'Gospodine Colonel,' said Vukovitch, 'my men and I are entirely at your command.'

This was the first and greatest stroke of luck for us. Radevitch was more pleased than he showed, and Bozha preened himself in the general approval.

Vukovitch's house was ideally situated to serve as the temporary headquarters we needed so badly, while we investigated the district around. The village of Zhegrova was scattered over a wide area of the hill, with the houses as much as a kilometre apart. Vukovitch's men were not in the usual run of chetniks, since they all lived at home, as we planned our men should. Here we had a platoon ready-made, whose members would report with their weapons as we needed them. Vukovitch swore to their absolute loyalty to him, and their devotion to the true Serbian cause, apart from politics of any kind. Their intelligence and their rifles would provide a guard for Radevitch and Stanimir, while the rest of us split up and engaged in various missions over the countryside.

We explained to Vukovitch as much of our plan as it was necessary for him to know. The first essential was to find a man of great influence, known throughout the villages, who would work with us, and introduce us to the leading men in every village. Vukovitch knew such a man.

He was called, said Vukovitch, Vitka Tcharapitch. He was the local leader of the Radical Party, though he had never succeeded in being elected to Parliament. Vukovitch was sure that he would work with us, for, so far, he too had held himself aloof.

We also questioned Vukovitch about Kurshumlje, and found out that it was occupied by a battalion of Bulgars. They, however, left the Serbs strictly alone, and the town was policed by a company of Neditch's militia and two companies of Pechanats's chetniks, the more powerful of them commanded by a regular army captain called Marijanitch, and the other by Kosta's son, Milan Pechanats.

For one day we rested and discussed plans for the immediate future. It was decided that Milenkovitch and I (I volunteered for the task more out of curiosity than enthusiasm) should go down to Kurshumlje on the next day, which was market-day, and find out Vitka Tcharapitch. We would carry a letter of introduction from Vukovitch.

Bozha offered to write us one too, for he claimed to know Vitka better than Vukovitch did.

'A letter from you', said Milenkovitch witheringly, 'would do more harm than good. I would hesitate to let you introduce me to a pawnbroker, you fat racketeer.'

Poor Bozha wilted under the attack.

Milenkovitch and I were also to investigate the mood of Neditch's militia there, which was the Fifth Armed Company. Both Ivanovitch and Milenkovitch thought it possible that it might contain officers and men who had fought with Mihailovitch in the earlier campaigns.

Milenkovitch had sewn a secret pocket in the band of his breeches, and in this he carried a passport from Drazha, dating from the time when he had joined the organization. There was also a document appointing him to the command of all Drazha's forces in the area of Valjevo, and another, signed by Radevitch, appointing him Drazha's Chief of Staff for the whole of Toplitsa. This looked, and sounded, impressive. In his pocket, openly, he also carried Gorditch's passport as a Kosta Pechanats chetnik. This passport carried the stamp of the German commandant of Trstenik, and, we hoped, would prove valuable in a tight corner. I, of course, had nothing at all, except a dog-eared piece of paper which Novakovitch had given me. This promoted me to major in the Jugoslav Army and recommended me for the Karageorge Star, the highest Serbian award! As Novakovitch had long ago disappeared and had not been heard of since, I had kept the paper as a souvenir. His authority, in any case, had never existed outside his own imagination.

Milenkovitch wore his uniform, as usual, with a huge Luger automatic hanging in a holster, and two bombs attached to his belt in chetnik fashion. I did not carry my rifle, because I thought that it would be far more nuisance than it was worth.

Kurshumlje looked a pleasant little town nestling in the valley below us. On the outskirts we fell in with a poorly dressed peasant who was going to market. Milenkovitch offered him a few dinars to take our message to Vitka Tcharapitch. He disappeared into the town, and we waited on the edge for him to reappear.

Looking along the high street, a long, wide road, flanked

with low, yellow houses leading to the main square, it seemed to us that every other person was a Bulgarian soldier or a member of the militia. There were crowds of peasants in the square, and the little town seemed to hum with pleasant bustle. Milenkovitch was in one of his gayest moods. At a house across the road a pretty girl opened a window and looked out, and Milenkovitch immediately crossed to pass the time of day with her.

'Whoever are you two?' she asked, her eyes twinkling.

'Guess,' said Milenkovitch.

'You are certainly not chetniks,' she said.

'How do you know?' said Milenkovitch, who was pleased that she had had the intelligence to divine so much so quickly.

'Because you have the air of having come straight from the woods.'

'Well, then, what are we, do you think?' insisted Milenkovitch.

'Nor are you Partisans,' said the girl.

'And how do you know that?'

'Because, if you were Partisans, you would not be so foolish as to come into *this* town openly, wearing your arms like that. I cannot tell what you are,' she said.

'We are officers of the new Jugoslav Army,' said Milenkovitch, 'and this man is an Englishman.'

'But there is no Jugoslav Army at the moment,' said the girl, 'and, if this man is an Englishman, then I am a Turk. I do not believe you.'

Milenkovitch crowed with delight. 'I knew, I knew you would not be able to believe it,' he said. 'That is why I told you. If Churchill himself arrived here by aeroplane, nobody would believe him.'

I had listened to this conversation with misgiving; it did not seem at all in the right vein. 'Careful,' I said to Milenkovitch, 'much more of your propaganda and they will be meeting us with a band.'

At that moment we saw our peasant approaching. 'I gave Vitka your letter,' he said, 'and he put it in his pocket and said that it was not for him.'

'Is that all he said?'

'Yes, he said: "That is not for me", and put it in his pocket.'

There seemed, for the moment, nothing we could do about *that*. Vitka Tcharapitch was our only contact in Kurshumlje, and it meant that we should have to carry out our investigations unaided.

We walked slowly along the wide, dusty street, which was crowded with peasants and their wives, carrying baskets of eggs and jars of thick cream cheese. On the corner of the wide market square stood a large café, cleaner and more prosperous than most, for some of the tables had table-cloths. I looked doubtfully at Milenkovitch. He looked like the prince of brigands, with his *shubara*, beard, and huge Luger automatic. I was also very conscious of my glasses, but was reluctant to take them off, for I wanted to see what was going on.

'Let's go into the café,' said Milenkovitch, 'and perhaps, with a bottle of wine, we shall be able to think of something to do next.'

We went in, and sat down at a table at one corner of the big, L-shaped room, from which we could see the door, without necessarily being seen by people who came in. Milenkovitch ordered an omelet to be made with fourteen eggs (I do not know why fourteen, but that was the number he always chose), and the waiter brought also a carafe of wine.

It gave me a strange sensation, sitting there and eating, with Bulgarian officers not taking the slightest notice. There were also chetniks and officers of Kosta Pechanats, all of whom would have arrested Milenkovitch and run me out of the town.

We had finished our omelet and ordered another carafe of wine before something happened. Four officers in the uniform of Neditch's militia came in and sat down at a table not far away.

'One of those was a classmate of mine at the Academy,' said Milenkovitch. 'I have known him since we were fourteen. We were excellent friends. I will try him out. You stay here and observe his reactions. If he turns nasty, make your getaway.'

I did not like the sound of that proposal, but there was nothing I could do about it, for Milenkovitch was already halfway across the room.

I saw him pause at their table, take a good look at a tall young lieutenant, and then go and take him by the hand. After a short pause, during which the lieutenant allowed himself to be taken by surprise by Milenkovitch's ample beard, they shook hands in the most cordial manner. They then embarked on a conversation which lasted half an hour, during which time I became very impatient. I called the proprietor of the café and paid our bill. Milenkovitch still elaborately took no notice of me. This, I thought, was all very well. Either they were friendly or unfriendly. If they were friendly, the safest thing for me to do would be to sit with them. If not, I had better make myself scarce. They looked friendly enough, and were all chatting and laughing.

Then Milenkovitch turned to me and beckoned. 'This', he said, 'is my friend Krsta, whose other name we will leave out for the moment. He is in this thing with me, and would like to hear what you have to say about the questions I have asked you.'

I shook hands all round, and then Milenkovitch's tall friend began to speak. 'I can answer for every single man of this company here. There is no one who would stay with Neditch if he thought he could work with Drazha Mihailovitch,' he said. The other officers nodded their agreement.

'There is only one man of whom I would be doubtful, and I am only doubtful of him because he is not reliable. He is Captain Djonovitch, the commanding officer,' said one of them.

'What other officers have you got besides Djonovitch and yourselves?' asked Milenkovitch.

'Only the second in command, who is a White Russian.'

'Has he passed through our Academy?' asked Milenkovitch.

'Of course. He is an officer of the regular infantry,' said the tall militiaman.

'Oho,' replied Milenkovitch, 'a White Russian, eh? They are the men whom I trust the least. They are men without a country, and therefore easily bought. Or else they are fanatics against communism, and therefore on the side of the Germans, who, they hope, will destroy the regime in Russia.'

'You are quite wrong,' said one of the officers. 'This Russian is not at all like that. He is absolutely one of us and can be counted on.'

'Nevertheless,' said Milenkovitch, 'not a word about what we are doing here, and who we are, to *him*.'

I could see that the four young men were extremely impressed with whatever Milenkovitch had told them. We went with them to their headquarters, and they treated us with a respect that was almost obsequious.

'Now,' said Milenkovitch, 'this is what you are to do. You, here, will be, for the time being, our main centre of intelligence. You must find a go-between, a man who will be willing to find us wherever we are, and through whom we can arrange a rendezvous, too, outside the town, so that, every time we want to consult, we shall not have to come in and find you. We shall want to know every German or Bulgarian troop movement of which you hear and, above all, orders to the chief of police which will affect the peasants, requisitions and so on. And, in the name of Drazha Mihailovitch, I absolutely forbid you to undertake any action against the Partisans, even if it means mutiny against this Djonovitch. If the worst comes to the worst, you can shoot him, one night, quietly.'

I could see that this last order was slightly more than the Neditchites had bargained for, but they made no comment, such had been the power of Milenkovitch's spellbinding.

They told us that, as we had thought, the Bulgarians seldom interfered in the life of the town. All the policing was done by this particular company of militia—the fifth. Kosta's chetniks were so unpopular, on account of the brutality with which they had put down Zakitch's communistic activities at the end of 1941, that their influence was very slight.

Captain Djonovitch was away from Kurshumlje, in Nish, and would not be back until the day after next, and so, for some unaccountable reason, Milenkovitch decided to stay in Kurshumlje for the night.

With our new friends we strolled into the market-place, where almost immediately we met yet another militia officer, wearing the pips of a captain, second class. It was the White Russian.

The officers introduced Milenkovitch to him. He in turn introduced me. 'Captain Lorentchitch, a Slovene,' he called me.

'A regular officer?' asked the Captain.

'Yes,' said Milenkovitch, obviously without thinking.

'Of what class in the Academy?' asked the Captain.

Milenkovitch calculated rapidly. 'Fifty-ninth,' he said.

'Nonsense,' said the Captain, looking at me closely. 'I was in the fifty-ninth, and I certainly don't recognize *you*.'

'What a silly mistake to make,' I said, speaking for the first time, and hoping that my accent would pass muster. 'Mine was the sixty-first.'

'H'm. Quick promotion?' said the Russian, for he was obviously a junior captain, and two classes later would make two years' difference in our seniority. However, he made no other comment. 'You are staying in the town for the night?' he asked.

'Yes,' said Milenkovitch.

'Where?' asked the Russian Captain.

'In the hotel above the café,' said Milenkovitch.

The Captain then excused himself and left us with the other militia officers.

When he had gone, Milenkovitch, not in the least disturbed, challenged the four Neditchites to a game of poker. We played in our room in the café, and he gambled like a madman. In spite of my own luck and caution, we lost several hundred dinars.

We had supper in our room, for, in spite of our newly-found but precarious respectability, we did not wish to appear too much in public, especially since the market-place was now clear of peasants.

Just after dark, as we were preparing for bed, there was a sudden tramping outside in the corridor. The door flew open, and four heavily armed men rushed in and covered us with rifles, on which their bayonets were fixed. On their heels was the Russian captain.

'I am sorry, gentlemen,' he said, 'but I must see your papers.'

I kept silent, and let Milenkovitch handle the situation.

'They are in my wallet,' he said.

The soldiers took away his arms and searched him. Out came all his passports as a chetnik of Kosta Pechanats, and a few private letters, none of which was compromising. They went through his trousers pockets, but all they found was a handkerchief. On me they found nothing, not even my certificate from Novakovitch, which I always kept, with one or two other things that I should not have liked found, in an envelope wrapped underneath my puttees.

For a moment the Russian Captain looked nonplussed. Then, apparently on the spur of the moment, Milenkovitch said: 'Tell me, Gospodine Captain, exactly what it is you want.'

'I must know', said the Russian, 'what it is you are doing here.'

'Very good. If you will give me your word of honour as an officer of the Jugoslav Army that you will return the papers to me, I will show you what you are looking for. Only first, send your men to the other end of the room.'

The Russian motioned the men to stand back. Milenkovitch felt in the belt of his trousers, and brought out the orders containing his two appointments. The Russian took them and, without looking at them, went out of the room. Two of the soldiers remained behind.

I was fairly convinced that he had gone to fetch the Bulgars, and had a few unpleasant minutes. But he came back all smiles.

'Why did you not tell me this before?' he said, saluting Milenkovitch. 'You allow me almost to arrest you, when it might in fact have been for you to arrest me. Now, what are your orders, for I am completely at your service?'

Milenkovitch did not even blink. His poker face was very poor, but, when greater things were at stake, he was perfect. He repeated what he had told the junior officers, but in far greater detail. And then, to my surprise and horror, he said:

'And to-morrow it will be necessary for us to go on to Prokuplje. I want you to arrange it.'

Prokuplje was the main town of Toplitsa. It was about forty kilometres from Kurshumlje, and was occupied by Bulgarian and German troops. To say, 'I want to go to Prokuplje' was almost as exaggerated as to say 'I want to visit Belgrade'. The Russian was obviously taken aback.

'You know that Prokuplje has a Gestapo headquarters, a small German garrison, a Bulgarian garrison, and its full complement of Kosta Pechanats's chetniks?' he said.

'Of course,' said Milenkovitch. 'Who is the *vojvoda* there? Do you know his name? Can you give us an introduction to him?'

'I cannot,' said the Russian. 'I do not even know his name. I believe that he has only recently been appointed. What I can do is to give you a certificate, saying that you are members of the Fifth Armed Company, and are in Prokuplje on duty.'

'That,' said Milenkovitch, 'might prove a help. How are we to get there?'

'To-morrow morning', said the Russian 'there is a lorry which goes every other morning from here, and comes back shortly after midday. It contains only members of this company, and is not searched by the Bulgarians on the barricade outside the town. It would be best for you to go on that, as the train service is very irregular.'

'Is there any reason, apart from curiosity, for your going to Prokuplje?' I asked Milenkovitch when we were alone.

'There are two people whom I want to contact,' said Milenkovitch. 'One is a captain who was with Drazha on the Ravna Gora, and the other is a classmate and friend of mine, who lives there. I have orders for them both. Apart from that, if we can enlist temporarily on our side Kosta's *vojvoda* there, we shall have gone more than half-way towards neutralizing the whole of his organization in Toplitsa.'

Though both of these reasons were partly valid, I knew that the chief attraction the town had for Milenkovitch was because of his irrepressible lust for adventure. Mine fell not far short at that time, and I needed very little persuasion.

The next morning we received our pass. It gave permission for Lieutenant Milenkovitch, a member of the Fifth Armed Company, to proceed to Prokuplje on duty, accompanied by one militiaman.

We drove along the valley beside the River Toplitsa. The journey would have been impossible for us on foot, for every village was swarming with Kosta Pechanats's chetniks, no doubt on the look-out for signs of the Partisans.

To the north of the road, towards the Jastrevats, Partisan influence was strong, for it was on the Jastrevats that they had their headquarters. From the rich villages between the River Toplitsa and the woods which covered the mountain they drew most of their supplies.

In Prokuplje's wide market square the lorry drew up. Milenkovitch had a short conversation with the driver, and then we walked across the square. Milenkovitch seemed to know exactly where he wanted to go. 'I know this place fairly well,' he said. 'I was stationed here for part of my course at the Academy.'

Milenkovitch's friend was called Rasha. He was, apparently, both surprised and horrified to see us in his own house. Milenkovitch explained to him a code, and gave him details of the sort of intelligence with which he was to keep us supplied. Rasha took these orders in the most matter-of-fact way. I could never at first understand why Milenkovitch's word had such effect; later I discovered that it was because of the very healthy reputation he had gained throughout the country for his exploits at Valjevo. Milenkovitch asked Rasha who the *vojvoda* of the town was, but even he did not know.

'He has only been here a few days,' said Rasha, 'and, for the moment, has kept his identity secret.'

We spent about an hour with Rasha, and then went on to Drazha's Captain, to whose house Rasha directed us. I was surprised at the orders which Milenkovitch gave him. He instructed him to apply to Neditch for permission to form a company in Prokuplje. This company would have only the most trustworthy men. They would counterbalance, said Milenkovitch, the influence of Kosta Pechanats's chetniks in the town, and quietly sabotage their activities. Moreover, since the Germans showed a disposition to co-operate more fully with Neditch than with Kosta, whose organization was far less efficient, it was possible that this company might finally oust the chetniks from political and military control of the district, as the Fifth Armed Company had in Kurshumlje. The Captain was, said Milenkovitch, to work with Rasha, but Rasha was to remain a civilian, in no way openly connected with him.

The details of this arrangement took a further hour to discuss. Milenkovitch impressed on the Captain that he was to keep his connection with us absolutely secret, not only from the Germans, but also from all but the most trustworthy of his own men. The Captain was very pleased with the idea. Like most regular officers who were true Serbs, since the defeat of Drazha's forces he had remained inactive solely because he did not know what course to follow. Milenkovitch's plan not only showed him a course, but also pleased his personal ambition, without which factor it is almost impossible to enrol any Serb to do anything. As prospective commandant of Prokuplje he would be an important man, both before and after the defeat of the Germans.

When we arrived back in the square, the lorry was gone. I was perturbed, but Milenkovitch was very calm about it. We repaired to the smallest of the cafés in the square, and ordered a meal and the inevitable carafe of wine. Milenkovitch sent a boy who was sweeping the floor to fetch Rasha.

'Now that he is a member of our organization,' he said to me, 'he may as well work for his living. His first task will be to show us a way out of this town.'

Rasha arrived in a state of nerves; he thought that he had seen the last of us. But he smothered his feelings very well when Milenkovitch, on hearing that the only way out of the town without being stopped on a barricade was by train, and that the next train was to-morrow morning, and perhaps not then, said that he must find us somewhere to stay until there was a train.

He had only just gone when three chetniks entered the café, and made straight for our table.

'Twice in two days,' said Milenkovitch to me, as they arrested us, and told us that we should have to go to headquarters to explain our identity. 'Now, perhaps, we shall find out who the mysterious *vojvoda* is.'

The chetniks were polite to us, for, after all, Milenkovitch still had Gorditch's passport, and his bearing was not that of an ordinary chetnik. Headquarters was in an hotel above another of the cafés. The chetniks told us to wait outside the office. 'The *vojvoda*', they said, 'is sleeping.'

A sergeant stayed with us, as guard, and we welcomed a moment to think about our position.

'What is the *vojvoda's* name?" asked Milenkovitch.

'I don't know,' replied the sergeant.

'How can it be that you, a sergeant in his company, do not know his name?'

'He has only just been appointed. None of us knows him yet.'

'I cannot understand all this mystery about a name,' said Milenkovitch. 'If you cannot tell me his name, tell me, what are his politics?'

'We are chetniks of Kosta Pechanats,' said the sergeant, rather stuffily.

'This man was on Kosta Pechanats's staff on the Sokolovitsa,' said Milenkovitch, indicating me, 'only, of course, he is not a Serb.'

The sergeant looked at me with interest.

'I was not exactly on the staff,' I said, 'but with it. There were a number of us. Kosta was very good to us.'

'Aha,' said the sergeant, 'I remember you perfectly. You are English!' He said the last word in a whisper, looking over his shoulder to see that nobody was near. 'I remember you now perfectly. Your name is Deni Alabasta.'

Now Denis Alabaster was the other sapper who had jumped out of the train with Peter Maynard. He was my own height and colouring, and also wore spectacles. I had already met Serbs who had confused me with him.

'Of course,' I said, 'that is my name. Denis Alabaster.'

The sergeant became quite friendly, and we discussed what he called 'the early days', when Kosta was an outlaw too.

Seeing that the ice had been broken, Milenkovitch asked suddenly, 'What do you think the *vojvoda* would say if we told him that we were officers of Drazha Mihailovitch?'

'Have no fear of the *vojvoda*, if that is the case,' said the sergeant. 'But this,' indicating a man coming along the passage, 'is his adjutant. I know nothing about him. Don't tell him.'

The adjutant asked us into the office. He was wearing a pair of riding-breeches, a blue lounge-suit jacket, and a trilby hat, which he did not take off. He told us to sit down, and began to question Milenkovitch, who would say nothing more than that he wanted to speak with the *vojvoda*. The adjutant did not seem to realize that we had been arrested, as Milenkovitch was still wearing his Luger and his bombs.

'The Captain's name is Bukvitch,' said the sergeant, during a pause. 'It is not everybody I would tell.'

'What did you say?' asked the adjutant, suspiciously.

'I was telling them that the Gospodine Captain would not be long,' replied the sergeant, who seemed to have changed sides in the most extraordinary way.

This whole conversation made me want to laugh. It did not seem quite real. Milenkovitch and the adjutant talked about the weather and Army shop in the friendliest manner until the *vojvoda* arrived.

He was a small and unimpressive man, but this was not reassuring, for my experience of Serbs had taught me that the small men were usually the most dangerous. The adjutant was still in the room, and Milenkovitch had to remain non-committal. He presented himself as one of Gorditch's officers, seconded to the Fifth Armed Company at Kurshumlje.

I was waiting for the inevitable question, 'What are you doing here?' when I had a sudden idea which I hoped might provide an answer. I knew that the sergeant had mistaken me genuinely for Denis Alabaster, and that Alabaster had not only been with Pechanats on the Sokolovitsa, but had also been in Prokuplje before the Partisan attack and the town's subsequent occupation by the Bulgars.

'And who, then, are you?' said the *vojvoda,* suddenly turning to me.

'I am an Englishman,' I replied.

'An Englishman?' repeated the Captain, astonished.

I told him that I was an escaped prisoner of war, and that I had been with Kosta on the Sokolovitsa. His own sergeant, I added, would bear me out in this.

'When my friend Milenkovitch told me that there was a lorry coming here from Kurshumlje, I asked him to bring me here because, when I was in this town before, I left here some personal things, letters and so on, which I should now like to collect. My friends in the town were so pleased to see me that they invited us to lunch, and we missed the lorry when it returned to Kurshumlje.'

I was, of course, gambling on the hope that this *vojvoda* would hesitate to hand over to the Germans an Englishman who had previously received the protection of Kosta Pechanats, even though he might be hostile to the Allies. The gamble worked. The Captain expressed his displeasure at the awkward position into which we had thrown him, and his astonishment at my foolhardiness in coming into a town that was so tightly occupied, and so full of Gestapo agents, but he was not hostile.

'In any case,' he said, 'I perceive that you have nothing to do with the Partisans. Had you been Partisans, I could not have let you go, even though you might have been English. As it is, you may go, but I insist that you leave Prokuplje immediately and never come back. You are very lucky to have been arrested by my men, and not by Bulgarians or Germans.'

We thanked him, and I breathed a huge sigh of relief. But to my astonishment, as Milenkovitch was about to leave the room, he said: 'Gospodine Captain, may I have a word with you alone? There is something important which I have to say to you.'

The Captain looked surprised, but he followed us along the corridor. Milenkovitch took him by the arm and, in a low voice, said: 'Captain Bukvitch, we are officers of Drazha Mihailovitch. This Englishman is a member of the military mission. We came here specially to talk with you. We have an important message for you from Drazha Mihailovitch himself.'

'Go into the café on the corner of the square. I will meet you there in half an hour,' said Bukvitch hurriedly, and went back into his office.

As soon as we were outside, I said in a rage: 'What in hell have you let us in for now?'

'I was not coming all the way to Prokuplje to get myself arrested and run out again with only half my task done,' said Milenkovitch smugly.

'Then you missed that lorry on purpose,' I accused him furiously.

'I did tell the driver not to wait,' said Milenkovitch.

I was speechless.

'There is not much sense sitting in a café without a drink,' said Milenkovitch, when we had reached the rendezvous. 'Let us have some wine.' And he ordered a bottle.

It was very good wine, though a trifle too sweet. We drank the first bottle very quickly, and Milenkovitch ordered another.

We waited nearly an hour, and still the Captain did not appear. Presently, Rasha came in. He did not look as though he was having a happy day.

'We heard that you had been arrested,' he said unhappily, 'and we did not know what to do. I have found you somewhere to sleep—in the priest's house. You go across the square from here, along that street over there [he pointed it out], and take the first on the right. After about a hundred metres you will come to a house with a monument in front of it. That is the house.'

Milenkovitch listened abstractedly. 'Have some wine?' he said when Rasha had finished.

'I dare not stay,' said Rasha; 'the curfew starts at seven o'clock, and I must be home by then.'

When he had gone, I asked Milenkovitch how he thought we were going to get to a house at the other end of the town if the *vojvoda* had not come by seven o'clock.

'Easy,' said Milenkovitch. 'We will ask for that sergeant to accompany us.'

It was exactly seven when the *vojvoda* appeared. He sat down at our table, and Milenkovitch immediately asked him, frankly, to what extent he was willing to co-operate with Drazha Mihailovitch.

Bukvitch's reactions were those of a man who appeared to know his own mind, and to have chosen the path which he intended to follow. He said that, for the time being, he would not actively interfere with our work in Toplitsa, whatever that might be, provided that it was not directed against Kosta Pechanats. He would not, on the other hand, countenance our appearance in Prokuplje. This attitude, he added, was dependent on the decision of Kosta Pechanats himself, whom he would consult.

The interview was short, but at the end of it we had to indicate that it was past seven o'clock and, though still light, impossible for us to find our way alone to our sleeping quarters. Bukvitch himself suggested that he should send the sergeant to accompany us.

As we left the café Milenkovitch said: 'I am dying of hunger. I wonder if there is somewhere where we can get something to eat.'

'There is no place,' said the sergeant, 'except a café not far from here which is the haunt of all the chetniks, and sometimes of German and Bulgarian soldiers too.'

'Never mind the Germans and Bulgarians,' said Milenkovitch. 'They will take us for chetniks. And the chetniks will know by this time that we are friends with the *vojvoda*.'

I pointed out that, as we were invited to sleep, we should presumably also be invited to a meal.

'Towns are not like villages,' said Milenkovitch. 'Food is scarce, and it would not be polite to accept.'

He told the sergeant to lead us to the café. It was a dismal-looking place in a side street off the square. The only room was full of soldiers, chetniks, Germans, and Bulgarians. Two Germans, both very drunk, were standing against the serving counter.

As we went in, one of the lenses fell out of my spectacles and rolled under the Germans' feet. One of them went on his hands and knees and retrieved it for me, with excessive Teutonic politeness.

It was with a strange excitement that I sat down at a table, where Milenkovitch ordered two plates of goulash and a large carafe of wine. We ate and drank well, in cheerful conversation with the sergeant and a number of other chetniks, who had gathered around our table. Then Milenkovitch asked the sergeant to take us home, and he dropped, for me, a bombshell. 'No,' he said, 'I can't. It is at least an hour after dark, and the town will be full of Bulgarian patrols. I do not even know how I am to get home myself.'

Milenkovitch, by this time, was in such an exalted frame of mind that nothing nonplussed him for long. 'Those two drunken Germans shall help us,' he said, with the air of a man who has hit on a great idea.

By this time I was beyond comment. I had a feeling that we could not go on doing things like this for very much longer without running into such trouble as would prove the end of us. But I perceived that it would be no use to argue with him, for he was more than a little advanced in wine.

He called the two Germans, who by this time were almost speechlessly drunk, over to our table, and invited them to sit down. He ordered yet another carafe of wine.

It appeared that the Germans were in slight trouble. They had drunk more wine than they could afford to pay for.

'Oh, but, friends,' said Milenkovitch, 'leave that to me.'

He took out some money—their bill was not more than forty dinars—and paid. The Germans were profuse in their gratitude.

The rest of that supper was, for me, a nightmare. I was careful to talk very little, although I noticed that neither of the Germans talked Serb. Milenkovitch had told the chetniks that I was a Slovene, and, so far, none of them seemed to have any suspicion. The sergeant had wisely held his tongue.

I seem to remember that the Germans were at our table for about half an hour, during which they were well plied with wine, and we drank toasts to the greatness of Serbia. Then Milenkovitch explained to them that it was very unpleasant crossing the town at night, for the Bulgars, uncultured fellows, were always challenging one. Would the Germans consent to accompany us as far as our houses?

They were more than willing. It was obvious that they had been very short of friends in Serbia, and were surprised and delighted to find some at last. One of them went with the sergeant, and the other came with us.

He was a little man, our German, not taller than about five feet two. We strolled along the road together humming 'Lili Marlene', and Milenkovitch putting in the Serbian words which he and Ivanovitch had written. At every mention of Hitler, the little German applauded loudly.

I hoped that Milenkovitch was looking for the right turning, but I had my doubts. Whenever I paused in my scrutiny of the houses, looking for a monument, I could hear him and the German deep in conversation. At one point, Milenkovitch was making a bid for the German's revolver, which was a Luger, similar to his own; but the German was not quite drunk enough to sell it. As a token of his friendship, however, he gave Milenkovitch a handful of ammunition.

Suddenly, coming along the street, we saw the expected Bulgarian patrol.

'Halt,' they cried, as soon as they saw us. 'Who is that?'

'Wir sind deutsche Soldaten,' cried the little German, drawing himself up to his full height and clicking his heels.

The Bulgars, tall, strong-looking men, loomed up towards

us. They looked doubtful, and I was thankful that it was not daylight.

'Deutsche Soldaten, deutsche Soldaten,' cried the little German, moving forward as though he were going to attack them. His vehemence and his ill manners did the trick, and the Bulgars, still doubtfully, stood aside and let us pass.

As soon as they had disappeared, I decided that it was about time that we searched for the priest's house in earnest. I went up to a house that stood a little way back from the road, and knocked at the door. The place was in darkness, and a man, in his shirt, put his head out of the window.

'Is there a priest living here?' I asked.

'No,' he said.

Then the little German came bustling up. 'Was ist los?' he asked, fussily.

At the sight and sound of him, the man at the window went even paler in the darkness, and his eyes grew round as saucers. He was sure that we had come to arrest him.

'Can you tell me, then, where the priest lives?' I asked pacifically.

'No,' he said, gasping, 'no, I cannot. There are not any priests living near here.' And he slammed the window.

Meanwhile, Milenkovitch had sobered a little, or appeared to have done so, and had been looking attentively at the houses on either side of the street. 'I have it,' he cried. 'Here is the monument.'

'Where?' I asked. 'I can see no monument.'

'There,' said Milenkovitch, and pointed to a tombstone leaning against the wall. And that was how I learnt that the word for monument in Serbo-Croat is the same as that for tombstone.

We knocked at the door, and a young man opened it. Milenkovitch, in a low voice, gave Rasha's name, and asked if we were at the right place. The man said that we were.

'But who the devil is that?' he asked, pointing at our German, who was, faithfully, still on our heels.

'I'll soon get rid of him,' said Milenkovitch. But that was more easily said than done. The little German was very reluctant to leave us. It was only after we had promised faithfully to meet him the next night in the café that he went sadly away.

'But why did you not come earlier?' asked the priest. 'My wife is away, but I asked some friends to prepare a meal for you. They even invited some ladies to keep you company. They will be very disappointed that you did not come earlier.'

'We could always go now, if they have not gone to bed,' said Milenkovitch.

But I had had enough; I was adamant. I refused to become involved in further adventures. And so, we went at last to bed.

The morning, however, brought its own adventures. We had yet to get out of the town. Every moment we stayed there was a moment too long for me. We went to consult Rasha.

'There may be a train,' he said; 'the only thing is for us to go to the station and see.'

He took us there, and we arrived without incident. A booking-clerk told us that a train was due from Nish, but he was doubtful whether it would go on to Kurshumlje. We elected to wait, on the off-chance that it might.

It steamed in half an hour later, and we asked the guard if it was going on. 'Yes,' he said, 'at the orders of a captain of Neditch's militia. You will have to ask his permission to travel on it.'

'Leave that to me,' said Milenkovitch, confidently.

He approached the Captain, who was rushing along the platform to supervise the loading of some boxes. 'Excuse me, Gospodine Captain,' said Milenkovitch. 'I am Lieutenant Milenkovitch of the Fifth Armed Company at Kurshumlje. May I travel on this train as far as there?'

'Of course, of course,' said the Captain, fussily, as he hurried by.

We boarded, and I sighed again with relief as the train drew out. There were two other people in the carriage, with whom Milenkovitch chatted during the short journey. As we approached Kurshumlje, Milenkovitch asked them:

'By the way, who is the Captain who is commanding this train?'

'That is Captain Djonovitch, commandant of the Fifth Armed Company,' one of them replied.

It was too much. The minute we left the train I insisted that we should hesitate no longer, but should make our way straight back to where we had left Radevitch and Stanimir.

For once, Milenkovitch was agreeable.

# IX

We arrived at headquarters to find Radevitch angry and anxious.

'You have taken three days over something for which I allowed you twenty-four hours,' he said. 'We thought that you must have been arrested. I sent Vukovitch to contact Vitka Tcharapitch, and he has done so without the fuss you have caused me.'

He was mollified when he learned the amount of information we had brought back, and especially pleased with the appointment of the two agents in Prokuplje, but nevertheless forbade us ever again to exceed our orders.

I, for one, had already made up my mind never again to do so.

Vitka Tcharapitch was all that we had expected him to be. He too was ambitious, and, as leader of the Radical Party in Toplitsa, had his own political organization ready-made. He was willing to hand it over to us immediately. His friends and agents throughout the villages, men with whom he had worked politically for years, became our friends and agents. They were mostly wealthy peasants, and all influential in their own districts. Under Vitka's leadership they had not become involved in the scramble for power that the war had brought. The soul of the country, as it appeared to disintegrate in the avaricious hands of Mika the Priest, Keserovitch, the Partisans, and Mashan Djurovitch, was yet guarded by this hard core of respectable men, men of insight and foresight, who realized that life must go on, and that a country's pulse must not be allowed to stop beating because her body was in fetters.

To these men we launched the very appeal which was likely to attract them, and many of them answered it. The work which we demanded of them did not necessitate their leaving their villages except on rare occasions, or until the final uprising which would chase the Germans out of the country. We offered them, too, the chance to be members of an organization with a progressive policy for the future, yet apart from the ruthless absolutism about which the Partisans continually talked. For a month we travelled about among the villages, making more and more friends. It was like building a jigsaw puzzle, fitting the organization together.

Always, breaking into new territory, I went first. Vitka's men could never understand why we went in such immunity from arrest or attack from Kosta's *vojvode*. My role was to arrange that. I went first and interviewed them. More and more boldly I told them that the British policy was out-and-out support for Drazha Mihailovitch (the British radio, to which they all listened, repeated daily the same thing), and that if they wanted to avoid the stigma of working with the Germans, since London had already publicly indicted Kosta Pechanats, they had better leave us alone. Our real work was kept secret from them. They did not know the names of any of our local leaders. But I almost invariably managed to persuade them to leave Radevitch, Milenkovitch, Stanimir, and Ivanovitch to work in peace, and obtained for them passes which would allow them to move freely in the country districts.

I even met Milan Pechanats, Kosta's son, a stupid young man, who was one of the *vojvode* in Kurshumlje, and enlisted his help. How easy it was! All these unhappy men knew that they were backing the wrong horse. They knew that retribution was bound to overtake them. But they were so blinded by ambition for immediate power that they pursued their course heedlessly, wilfully hiding the truth from themselves. I would offer them, first, complete co-operation. They were to stop all activities against the communists, and disband their men. This, with a very few exceptions, they refused. Then I offered them the compromise of neutrality towards us, and they accepted it willingly. They little knew that, once our organization was strong enough, they would be the first whom we should destroy.

Among them I struck two nuts which I could not crack. The first was Bukvitch, and the second, Marijanitch, *vojvoda* at Kurshumlje. Unfortunately, they were both powerful in several villages, and in their territory we could not work in safety. Marijanitch had once hanged seventy of Zakitch's Partisans in rows along the road.

At the beginning of April, the whole of our staff met on the Sokolovitsa, Kosta's' traditional headquarters, the mountain on which he had landed by plane in 1917, and there we discussed progress.

Our political organization, thanks largely to Vitka Tcharapitch, was already strong enough throughout two provinces for us to be able to set military leaders to work. We had found several officers in Kurshumlje and the villages round about who had remained uncompromised by connections with Neditch or Pechanats, and they provided us with our nucleus. We insisted that none of our military leaders should have gained reputations either as Partisans or as chetniks.

Ivanovitch was a brilliant publicist, and his propaganda sheets, which he signed with the pseudonym 'Lieutenant Dragi', were circulated through the villages by our agents. They contained histories of the collapse of Jugoslavia and the Fascist plot which caused it, biographies of Drazha Mihailovitch and his leaders, and of Radevitch, Milenkovitch, and Stanimir. They violently attacked Kosta Pechanats and Milan Neditch, and other notorious traitors such as Ljotitch and the Albanian Dushan, *vojvoda* at Blatse. They denied the rumours, sedulously spread by Kosta's men, especially since we had been in Toplitsa, that Pechanats was working hand in glove with Mihailovitch, and exposed the countless incidents of peculation and barefaced robbery practised by the *vojvode*. They advocated co-operation with the Partisans. Often they attacked those very *vojvode* who had most recently promised us their protection.

Very quickly, this propaganda began to bear fruit. Many of the men in Kosta's companies took their rifles and went home. The *vojvode* themselves became more and more unpopular, and did not understand it. But they did not attribute it to our activities, because whenever we met them, and we took care that it was always in seclusion, we were brotherly in our expressed affection for them.

Ivanovitch, Milenkovitch, and I also discussed the advances which they proposed to make to the Partisans. Prekoputse, Ivanovitch's village, was towards the Jastrevats, in the heart of Partisan country, and Ivanovitch hoped to contact them there. He had decided to offer them complete co-operation, even to the extent of leaving Dragomir Lastitch with them as our representative. Dragomir, of course, was more than willing.

Radevitch also wished to send a report of progress to Drazha Mihailovitch. I again volunteered to go with Stanimir Radenkovitch, because it was still my intention to find Captain X and, from him, the truth about Drazha's connections with England.

We all set out from the Sokolovitsa together, Ivanovitch and Milenkovitch for the Partisan headquarters, and Stanimir and I for Trstenik.

Stanimir and I parted half-way to Brus, for he had several other assignments on the outskirts of the territory. We arranged to meet at Chika Milan's house, near Trstenik.

About noon on the second day of my journey, which I took slowly, for there was no hurry, I arrived in a village which I had known from the days when I had been with Keserovitch. There I called for lunch at the house of a peasant whose son had been in my platoon at the battle of Kraljevo.

'Gospodine Krsta,' said this peasant, after he had greeted me and learned where I was going, 'you must avoid Brus.'

'Why ever should I?' I asked, for Brus was full of my friends.

'Mashan Djurovitch is there, and is raving against Keserovitch.'

'But what has become of Petar and Deni [Peter Maynard and Denis Boon]?' I asked.

'It is all right for them, he dare not touch them, because he is trying to win popularity. But he knows that you have been with Keserovitch, and so it is different for you.'

'If he dare not touch them, he will not be able to do anything to me either.'

'Gospodine Krsta,' said the peasant, 'Mashan is a terrible man. Have you heard what he has already done?'

And the peasant recounted yet another story which made my blood run cold.

Mashan Djurovitch, in his hatred and jealousy of Keserovitch, had launched yet another attack against him, which Keserovitch had easily evaded. Djurovitch had then tried a new method. He arrived in Brus with two hundred splendidly equipped soldiers, in lorries, on each of which was mounted a machine-gun. He summoned the peasants from all the villages around, and started a propaganda campaign. For several days he held parades by day and celebrations by night, all combined with a frightening show of force.

Then, one night, sitting in a café, surrounded by his cutthroats and peasants, he said:

'There is nothing which it is not within my power to achieve. Have you an enemy here? Is there a man of whom you would be rid? I will bring his head and display it in the market-place!'

A peasant stood up, and Mashan's finely cut features flushed with pleasure. 'Gospodine *Vojvoda,*' said the peasant, 'we have an enemy.'

'Tell me,' said the *vojvoda,* choking with excitement, 'tell me who he is.'

The peasant turned to the assembled company. 'When I mention this man's name,' he said, 'will anyone who disagrees with me raise his hand?'

'Who is he?' said the *vojvoda*, quietly, 'only tell me his name.'

'His name', said the peasant solemnly, 'is Dushan the Albanian, adjutant and successor to Mika the Priest, *vojvoda* of Blatse.'

Nobody raised his hand, and there was a murmur of assent.

Djurovitch went white with fury. He had expected the

peasants to name Keserovitch. Dushan was his own accomplice.

'Gospodine *Vojvoda,*' said the peasant, 'his is the head which we should like to see in the market-place. He has stolen our stock and robbed us of our grain. He has dishonoured our women and misled our sons. Bring us the head of that man, and we will believe the things which you have told us.'

'I will bring him,' snarled the *vojvoda.* 'I will certainly bring him.' He called two of his lieutenants. 'Within twenty-four hours,' he said, 'I want the head of the Albanian Dushan, *vojvoda* of Blatse. Go and fetch it.'

The lieutenants went. They took a lorry and several men, and called on Dushan. 'Mashan Djurovitch wants to see you urgently, alone,' they told him. 'You are to come with us.'

He came without question. A few miles from Brus they told him that he was to be executed. They led him down to the bank of the River Rasina, and there they stood him against a tree. Three men fired at him with rifles, but, as they fired, he ducked behind the tree and started to wade the river. As they fired again, he escaped in the bushes on the other side. But they had wounded him in two places.

Dushan crossed the river again, and ran all the way to Razbojna, a village near by. There he took refuge in a café, and tried to attend to the flesh wounds in his leg. But they caught him there, and shot him dead.

They stripped him naked, and cut off his head, and brought it to Brus, where the *vojvoda* was waiting. There it was displayed, all the next day, in the market-place.

'Gospodine Krsta,' repeated the peasant, 'I warn you to keep away from Brus and from Mashan Djurovitch. He is a terrible man.'

'Does he intend to stay in Brus?' I asked.

'Worse,' said the peasant. 'He has now issued a proclamation which calls upon Keserovitch's men to go home. If, he says, they are not all in their homes within forty-eight hours, he will burn down their houses and arrest their relations.'

'But this must be stopped at all costs. Do you think he will do it?'

'I would believe anything of him,' said the peasant. 'He is a terrible man.'

After I had eaten I walked on slowly towards Brus. I was still uncertain as to what I should do.

Just outside the town I overtook a bullock-wagon, and asked the peasant who was driving it to allow me to ride with him. He agreed.

Brus presented a military appearance. All the cafés and public buildings had been taken over by Mashan's soldiers, and three lorries were drawn up in the main street. I intended to let the bullock-wagon take me through the town as far as the orphanage, where I hoped to find Peter and Denis. But half-way through a cheerful voice said in English: 'Room for a small one?' and Peter leaped up beside me.

I climbed down, and we walked together to the orphanage.

'Do you think', I asked Peter, 'that it's safe for me to go and see Djurovitch?'

'He has been very friendly to Denis and me,' said Peter. 'I see no reason why you should not.'

I found Mashan in the house where he was staying, and had dinner with him. After dinner, when we were alone, I approached him in a similar manner to that in which I had approached other *vojvode* in Toplitsa. But it cut no ice.

'I must destroy Keserovitch,' he kept on saying; 'the man is dangerous in himself, but, what is more, he harbours men who are even more dangerous.'

'Who are they?' I asked.

Mashan named a number of men in Keserovitch's company, some of whom existed only in his own fevered brain. He included on the list Stanimir Radenkovitch, 'that dangerous communist', as he called him. This was doubly disturbing, because we had hoped that all Stanimir's enemies thought that he was dead.

'He is dead,' I said. 'He was killed by Gorditch's men in the fighting round Kraljevo.'

Mashan's impassive face did not alter. 'There is also an Englishman,' he said, 'an escaped prisoner of war. That man is a criminal.'

'What is the Englishman's name?'

'I don't know,' said Mashan, 'but during the battle of Kraljevo he did fearsome things. He was with the Partisans then, and whenever he caught prisoners he tortured them.'

'Did he catch many prisoners?'

'A good number,' said Mashan. 'And he beat them, to try and get information out of them, and cut off their arms and legs.'

'Well, I have never heard that,' I said, 'and when I met Keserovitch he said nothing to me about him. Who told you these things?'

'It is well known in the district around Kraljevo,' said Mashan.

'Listen, Gospodine *Vojvoda,*' I said; 'if I bring you a written order from Kosta Pechanats, will you cease your attacks on Keserovitch?'

'Kosta Pechanats would sign no such order. He is a more desperate enemy to Keserovitch than I am.'

'But, if I bring you an order, will you stop attacking him?'

'If Kosta Pechanats gave an order, I should have to obey it.'

'Very well, then; will you give me ten days to obtain the order, and promise me that in the meanwhile you will not persist in your plan to burn Keserovitch's men's houses?'

'Oh, that,' said Mashan, 'as to that, I give no promise.'

And with that I had to be content.

I came away from the interview convinced that I had been talking with the most dangerous man whom I had so far met. Mashan was tall and dark, with flaring nostrils and a pale complexion. His mouth was exceptionally mobile, sometimes sensually full, and at others compressed into a thin line of startling red. His eyes were large, dark, and sombre. He habitually ate almost nothing, and on the two occasions on which I had meals with him he scarcely touched his food. I knew that he was a fanatic, with no other belief than in his own advancement, and I half suspected that he was mad. There was no doubt that his sole motivation was personal power. He loved having people at his mercy, and, like all his sort, could be capable of extraordinary acts of generosity.

He was by far the best organizer of any among those of Neditch's or Kosta Pechanats's leaders with whom I came in contact, and enjoyed the confidence of the Germans to a very high degree. The result was that his men were always well paid, well clothed, and well fed. For that reason there was no lack of recruits, for his territory stretched right down the valley of the Ibar as far as the Albanian frontier, across which many Serbs were continually being driven, in the direst poverty.

I sent a message to Keserovitch, recounting my conversation with Mashan, and urging him to stay quiet and not to indulge in any acts of provocation while Mashan remained in Brus. I subsequently learned that this very message stirred him to circulate an ultimatum to Mashan, demanding his immediate withdrawal. This ultimatum was the cause, in its turn, of the deaths of the families of several of Keserovitch's men, and the burning of their houses.

I stayed the night with Moskovljevitch, since I did not wish to compromise the doctor at the orphanage, and in the morning went on to Chika Milan's house, near Trstenik, which I reached the same afternoon. Stanimir was already there. I explained to him the situation in Brus, and he endorsed what I had done, and was about to do. We sent an urgent message to Bogdan Gorditch to come and meet us.

Gorditch arrived at midnight, and I told him that it was imperative that I should see Kosta Pechanats.

'But that is impossible,' said Gorditch. 'Do you know where Pechanats is?'

'I am told that he is in Krushevats,' I said.

'Not only are the Germans in full occupation of Krushevats,' said Gorditch, 'but they keep a very tight watch on the old man. It is sometimes difficult even for me to get to see him.'

'Listen, Bogdan,' said Stanimir, 'you must get a civilian passport for Krsta, and provide him with the means of getting to Krushevats without using the railway.'

'I can't do it,' replied Bogdan. 'It would be suicide.'

'That is for Krsta to judge,' replied Stanimir.

We asked Gorditch, in addition, for material to make a suit of clothes for me, as mine were very shabby, and told him that we needed money. Eventually, he agreed reluctantly to do everything that we asked.

Once having made up his mind, he acted with great speed and efficiency. The next day one of his men arrived with a camera, and the photograph for the passport was ready by noon. Before dusk the faked civilian passport, which described me as a Slovene, a refugee who had arrived in Trstenik in May 1941, from Bled, was ready. The man who brought it brought also a roll of green material for my suit, and several thousand dinars.

Gorditch had made arrangements that I should go to Krushevats the next day on a chetnik lorry. One man, who had the entrée into Kosta's headquarters, would accompany me. Stanimir set out the same night for Gornje Milanovats.

That lorry drive to Krushevats was a cross between a dream and a nightmare. I could not believe that it was true. I sat in the seat next to the driver, with my roll of material tucked under my arm, and my mind in a whirl. I had no idea of what awaited me. I fully realized that the odds were against my walking out of the town a free man if, indeed, I ever succeeded in entering it.

But we drove straight in, and continued along the main street. We stopped at a tall hotel, the ground floor of which was occupied by German soldiers. There was a chetnik guard on the door, who let us in when the man who was with me showed his pass. Up several flights of stairs. Along a corridor. This part of the hotel seemed deserted.

We came to a sort of office, and announced to the chetnik officer on duty there that I was a special courier from Gorditch to Kosta Pechanats, and handed him a sealed envelope, which, we said, he was to hand to Kosta only when he was alone with him. This letter was from Gorditch, and explained that I was the Englishman whom Kosta had helped in September 1941, and who would now like a further interview.

Kosta's officer came back to where I was waiting. 'Come this way,' he said.

He took me along some more corridors, and at the end of one he opened the door into a room. 'You are to wait here,' he said.

I went in and heard the door locked behind me.

The room was a bedroom, high up in the hotel, and the window looked out over a courtyard and a vista of roofs. I could see German soldiers moving in the streets below. I waited and waited. Someone brought me a meal at midday, and another late in the evening. Some time during the day, I noticed that there was a washbasin, with hot and cold water, of which only the cold worked. The walls were painted green, and there was a carpet on the floor. It was, in short, for the Balkans, a luxurious hotel.

After I had eaten the evening meal, the chetnik who had received me came in and, looking curiously at me, said: 'Kosta will see you at four o'clock in the morning. You had better get some sleep.'

I lay on the bed, and after a little while went to sleep.

It was dark when they came to awaken me. We went along more corridors, most of them unlit. The building seemed enormous. The officer knocked at a door and opened it.

Kosta was sitting on a bed in his pyjamas, which he wore over all his underclothing. He seemed much older than when I had met him in Guberevats. The room was full of smoke, and stank of having been slept in with the windows shut. Kosta, the whole time that I was with him, chain-smoked cigarettes.

I sat down on a chair, and the chetnik sat on the bed beside Kosta. I noticed that they watched closely every movement that I made.

'Gospodine *Vojvoda,*' I said, 'I am that Englishman whom

you helped in Guberevats in September 1941. Since then, I have made contact with Drazha Mihailovitch, who, as you know from the British radio, to which I have no doubt you listen, is the British representative of the guerrilla movement in this country. I have received from Mihailovitch this task, of coming to find you. Certain of your leaders are so opposed to our movement that it is impossible for us to work.

'A short time ago, as you also know, the British radio openly denounced you as a fifth-columnist. That, of course, was on the instructions of Mihailovitch. If you would wish to avoid further references of that sort, we must insist that you put a curb on such of your leaders as will not leave us to carry out our work in peace.

'I alone,' I said, 'of all the officers of Drazha Mihailovitch do not believe that you are an enemy to Serbian freedom. I do not believe that you are working with the Germans wholeheartedly. You must know, and have already told me, that they are enemies to the whole of the Serbian race, and, indeed, to all the Slav races. If I can take back a favourable report to headquarters it is possible that, secretly, our policy towards you may change, though, openly, we shall continue to attack you as long as your men remain in company with our enemies.'

For some moments Pechanats did not speak. Then he said: 'Drazha Mihailovitch is entirely to blame for the sad situation in which the country finds itself at the moment.'

'And how is he to blame?'

'In 1941', said Kosta Pechanats, 'I made a pact with the Germans, who recognized that I was the strongest among their opponents, and were willing to appease me. I agreed with them that I would defend the country against the activities of the communists, as I had always done before the war, and they agreed that, on their part, they would withdraw their troops from all our cities. The withdrawal actually began in September 1941, but of course, when the Partisans made their cowardly attack on my men at Uzhitza, and Drazha Mihailovitch attacked the Germans at Chachak and Gornje Milanovats, they did not keep their promises to me. And I was in the unenviable position of having committed myself to serve with them.'

'If they had withdrawn, what would you have done? In what position would you have been?' I asked.

'I should have commanded the only armed force in the country and, as such a commander, I should have been able to exert pressure on Neditch. Serbia would have been largely her own mistress, and the army which would have eventually driven the Germans out would have been formed unhampered by the Gestapo.'

'Do you think that the Germans would have carried out their promises, and left you in a position like that?' I asked.

'Undoubtedly they would have. I had the solemn promise of the Commandant of Belgrade. They do not break their promises, men like that.'

I was puzzled. Was this man really so naïve? Was he really so blinded by his sense of his own importance that he believed what he was saying? Or was he, in his turn, trying to lead me up the garden path?

'Now that your original plan has failed, what do you intend to do?' I asked. 'Why do you continue to maintain forces in the pay of the Germans when you know that that is collaboration with the enemy?'

'There are many reasons,' said Kosta Pechanats. 'First, because there must be some armed force in Serbia. We have other enemies than the occupiers. There are the Bulgars, and the Albanians, who are even now trying to encroach on our territory. If Germany should collapse suddenly, mine is the only armed force which could possibly keep the Bulgars and the Albanians from completely overrunning the country.'

'One of Mihailovitch's aims,' I said, 'one that he has publicized, is to form a Balkan entente, into which the Bulgars would come.'

A flash of real fire passed through Pechanats's eyes. 'Mihailovitch did not fight against the Bulgars in the last war,' he said, incorrectly. 'The time when Serbs and Bulgars could work peaceably together is long past. I saw the atrocities which they committed in 1917 and 1918.'

There was another pause. Pechanats continued: 'Secondly, there are the communists. There is a danger that the people will become communist, especially with the encouragement which they receive from the London radio. And if Serbia turns to Russia, she is lost for ever as an ally of France and England. If there were no armed force to combat them, after the collapse of Germany the communists would seize power in every town.'

'You know', I said, 'that the communists also attack Drazha Mihailovitch. They are his enemies. Why then do you also continue to attack him?'

'I do not attack him. I defend myself against him.'

'You attack Keserovitch continually,' I said.

'Keserovitch is different. He and another officer, a Lieutenant-Colonel Radevitch, are my personal enemies. They have, together and separately, on several occasions, tried to assassinate me. I cannot do other than attack them, in self-defence.'

'That is precisely what I have come here to ask you not to do,' I insisted. 'Unless you order your men, and in particular Mashan Djurovitch, to stop harrying Keserovitch, I shall be quite unable to prevent the British from listing you as a dangerous fifth-columnist.'

'I know', said Kosta Pechanats, after he had thought for a few moments, 'that the British must attack me on the radio. That is politics. I had hoped that they knew that I was not really their enemy.'

'How can they know when you wage constant war on their friends?' I said. 'If you wish to bring your policy into line with that of Serbia's allies, you must do two things which I ask of you.'

'What are they?' said Kosta, in his tired, old man's voice.

'You must give me a written order for Mashan Djurovitch, to cease his attacks on Keserovitch, and to withdraw his men from Brus. And you must send orders immediately to Captain Bukvitch and Captain Marijanitch, in Toplitsa, not to interfere with his officers who are working there.'

I could see that Kosta was shaken. 'Do you mean to tell me,' he said, 'that Drazha Mihailovitch is working in my territory—in Toplitsa?'

'He is working in Toplitsa,' I replied.

'What is the name of his commandant there?' said Kosta.

'Dimitrije Milenkovitch,' I replied, conscious that, had I said Radevitch, Kosta might have been further deterred from doing as I had asked him. 'They will be difficult for you to find. I can seldom succeed in making contact with them myself. I suggest that, if you want to, you should try through your son, Milan.'

This surprised Kosta more than anything that I had yet said. Although Milan was the least intelligent of Kosta's *vojvode,* Kosta placed a great deal of faith in his opinion.

'To show you,' I said, 'to what extent your son is under our influence, read that.'

I took out from my wallet a pass which Milan had given me, to enable me to escape the attentions of his chetniks if they should stop me on the road. As usual, it described me as a Slovene. It said that I was a special courier in the service of Milan's company. Kosta read it in amazement.

'If I were to give you the orders which you require,' he said anxiously, 'they would not fall into the hands of the Germans?'

'Has that fallen into the hands of the Germans?' I asked, pointing to Milan's pass.

'But they would destroy me. You would promise?'

'If they did fall into the hands of the Germans, they would destroy the work which we are both trying to do,' I said impatiently.

Kosta asked the chetnik, who had listened attentively to what we had been saying, for a pen and paper. Grunting asthmatically, he moved to a desk beside the bed, and painfully, in a crabbed and uneducated hand, wrote the orders. They were written in Cyrillic script, and I could not read them. But I pretended to, and then put them safely into my wallet.

'Not there, not there,' said Kosta anxiously. 'Put them under your puttees.' To please him I did so. I felt intensely sorry for him, and for what I was about to do. For he was

right, those documents might have destroyed him. I intended them to, but did not remain long enough in Jugoslavia to ensure that they were so used.

By the time we had finished the interview it was light. I asked for a man who would take me to the railway station. I intended to catch the first train that would take me halfway back to Trstenik. There, at a village, I planned to alight, for I had an order from Gorditch to the *vojvoda* at the village, to provide me with a horse to take me to Alexandrovats.

In the grey of the morning, we walked through the deserted streets to the railway station, without seeing any Germans. At the station, I sat down on a bench in a corner for there was about an hour and a half to wait.

As the time for the train drew near, I noticed a tall man whom I recognized, wearing the insignia of one of Kosta's *vojvode.* It was 'the Stork'. I picked up my bundle of cloth, which I was carrying under one arm, and moved quietly to the far end of the platform. There I took off my spectacles and put them in my pocket.

'The Stork' strolled idly along the platform towards me. I tried to slink by him, but he saw me, and stared.

'Hey, young man, come here,' he said.

I went up to him humbly.

'Who are you?' he asked.

'I am a Slovene, a refugee,' I said.

'Are you a chetnik?'

'Yes.'

'In whose company?'

'Milan Pechanats's company at Kurshumlje.'

'Where are you going now?'

'To Alexandrovats.' As soon as I had said this, I realized that it was a mistake. 'And then, on to Brus,' I added.

'What is your business in Brus?'

'My relations are there, and I want to see them.'

'What are your relations called?'

'Gobbetz.'

This was another mistake, for I realized that, should he ask to see my passport, it was made out in the name of Lorentchitch. But I thought that he might remember that name, from the time when I had been in Alexandrovats with Novakovitch.

'What is your business in Alexandrovats?' asked the *vojvoda.*

'Gospodine,' I replied, 'these are not the times when a man can tell everyone his business on a railway station.'

'But I am the *vojvoda* at Alexandrovats.'

'I am sorry, Gospodine *Vojvoda,* I did not know. I am only going to Alexandrovats to have this material made into a suit.'

'Have you ever been with Keserovitch?' said 'the Stork', looking at me closely.

'You mean the Partisan leader on the Kopaonik?'

'You know very well who I mean. Dragoljub Keserovitch, who has a company of brigands on the Kopaonik.'

'But of course not, Gospodine *Vojvoda,*' I replied. 'I am a chetnik.'

'The Stork' looked far from satisfied, but, with an impatient exclamation, turned away.

Knowing the shortage of transport at the chetniks' disposal generally, when I alighted from the train I ran all the way to the local chetnik headquarters and obtained the only dogcart available. I forestalled the *vojvoda* by a few minutes.

At Alexandrovats I knew that I was safe from him, for most of the inhabitants knew me as well as did those of Brus, but I only paused there long enough to leave my material with a tailor, for whom I drew a picture of British service dress, which I told him to copy as closely as he could. (The material was too green, but I thought that an approximation was the best I could do.)

Then I borrowed a horse from Lika Milkovitch, the son of a rich wine-grower, and rode as fast as I could for Brus.

I was too late. Djurovitch, enraged by Keserovitch's ultimatum, had burned to the ground the houses of three of his men, and withdrawn to his usual headquarters at Rashka. I left the horse with Moskovljevitch, whom I asked to return

it, and started, on foot, the long climb to Kriva Reka. Halfway there I met Rade Chirakovitch, out with another man on patrol. It was good to see him again.

'How is Sima?' I asked him.

'Sima is dead,' said Rade.

'How?' I asked, horrified. 'Did Mashan get him too?'

'No,' said Rade, shortly, 'it was internal politics up there' —he nodded towards Kriva Reka—'Popovitch's fault.'

'You don't mean to say that Keserovitch has had him killed?' I was astounded, as well as grieved.

'You know,' said Rade, 'that Popovitch and Radiuje have for a long time been jealous of Vlakovitch, and that Vlakovitch was against the attack on "the Stork"?'

'I know that,' I said, for this had been so even before I left Keserovitch's company.

'Well, some time ago two men arrived and asked to be enlisted. They had been with Zakitch's Partisans in Toplitsa, but had deserted after the fighting at Kurshumlje in January. Keserovitch accepted them, because they both brought their rifles with them. Popovitch and Radiuje were against it, because, they said, it was dangerous to have Partisans in the company, and Mihailovitch had forbidden it. Vlakovitch persuaded Keserovitch to keep them, and they were put in his platoon. They were soon very friendly with Sima, for he had met them in Brus in the first place, and persuaded them to join.

'Popovitch and Radiuje were furious. Because Keserovitch would not listen to them, they invented a plot against his life. They said that these Partisans had come simply to assassinate Keserovitch, and that they had been sent by Boginja—you remember, the woman who was with Zakitch.'

'I remember,' I said, for I thought that I would not easily forget her sad, pretty face.

'She is now commandant of part of the Partisan force on Jastrevats,' said Rade. 'The people around here tell terrible stories about her—how she cuts off women's arms and legs, and makes men make love to her in front of their wives, and so on.'

'What nonsense!' I said. 'Doesn't Boginja mean "blessed by God", or something like that? They called her that because she was good, and they loved her.'

'Exactly,' said Rade. 'But Popovitch said that Sima had always been mixed up with the Partisans, and was always meeting them in Brus, which was, of course, true.'

'But he was loyal and well disciplined,' I said.

'Of course,' agreed Rade. 'But Keserovitch believed Popovitch and Radiuje. He has always been afraid of being assassinated, and they played on his fear. They advised him to send Sima out on patrol with Bichanin and Misha Ivanishovitch, and give them orders to shoot him. Keserovitch did so. When they were in the woods over there they shot him in the back of the head, without any warning.'

'What about the others?'

'Them, too.'

I was overcome. My nerves were already strained almost to breaking-point. A fierce gust of hatred for everything Serb, and in particular for Keserovitch, overtook me.

'I'll confront Keserovitch with this,' I said. 'The man's a murderer, and I'll tell him so.'

'I shouldn't,' said Rade. 'If you had been there, they would have implicated you too. They hate you. They have already spread a story of how it was your fault that Mashan burned the houses. They hate you because you can do things and go to places where they dare not. But, more than anything, they hate you because the peasants like you.'

'But I must see Keserovitch,' I said, coming to my senses. 'It is madness for him to go on provoking Mashan until, at least, he gets some more arms and ammunition. He couldn't undertake even the smallest action against anyone, let alone Mashan.'

'He thinks he is going to get some,' said Rade. 'He has sent Popovitch with a patrol to Drazha Mihailovitch, and they are to fetch back a radio transmitting-set. He thinks he has got a good aerodrome on the top of the Kopaonik. You know, there's a very good flat space there, nearly a kilometre long.'

'He won't get any arms,' I said. 'Not for a long time yet. Unless he takes them from the Germans, and he's far too weak. It's a vicious circle.'

'Rade,' I said, after a pause, 'come with me to Toplitsa.'

'If only I could,' said Rade. 'Will you ask?'

When I reached headquarters, I was immediately aware of an atmosphere of hostility. I did not expect them to be grateful for what I had tried to do, but was nevertheless disappointed. When I asked Keserovitch if he would allow Rade to come with me on my journeyings he refused, and flew into a great rage. I got the impression that a year of hardship had slightly unbalanced him.

I spent a night with Vlakovitch in his platoon headquarters, and found him depressed. He was convinced that the morale of Keserovitch's men was so low that they would never be any good in action. He thoroughly approved of what I had done, and of the result of my interview with Kosta Pechanats.

'But life here is becoming impossible,' he said. 'I seldom go near headquarters now.'

He asked me, when next I saw Drazha Mihailovitch, to ask if it would not be possible for him to be sent on some other duty elsewhere, preferably at Drazha's headquarters.

Next morning I set out for Rashka. As I left Vlakovitch he said: 'I don't like your going to Rashka. But there is one man in Djurovitch's company who is my friend. His name is Dangitch. Give him my greetings. If there is any trouble, he will help you, if he can.'

Mashan had an outpost in Joshanichka Banja, a little mountain village in the Kopaonik, which had been a health resort, and was now almost deserted. There were hot springs there.

From Joshanichka Banja I travelled to Rashka in one of Mashan's lorries, which left me outside his headquarters.

I was puzzled at Mashan's reception of me. He left me sitting in his office while he transacted business with a number of men and officers. It was not until after lunch that I was able to get a word with him alone.

'I have brought you the order from Kosta Pechanats, telling you not to interfere with Keserovitch,' I said.

'Let me see it.' He glanced at it, and threw it back to me.

'Of course,' he said, 'this is not binding on me. Neditch, and not Kosta Pechanats, is my commandant. I take orders only from Neditch.'

The interview was fruitless, and I determined to stay in Rashka until I could find out exactly what Mashan was doing, and, if possible, what sort of discipline and morale there was among his men, and whether they were such out-and-out collaborationists as I had been led to believe.

During the afternoon I managed to find Dangitch, and introduced myself to him. He told me that Mashan was mad.

'He has tuberculosis,' he said, 'and knows very well that he has not long to live. Because of that he intends to get as much power and live as well as he can during the occupation. He does not expect to outlive it.'

'But his men?' I asked. 'And you yourself? Surely you know that this is not at all the right course to be taking.'

'I am different,' he said. 'I am not here because I want to be, but because I am ordered. Drazha Mihailovitch is not far from here. I was with him on the Ravna Gora. I am here because Mashan and his men constitute a continual threat to his safety while he is within a couple of days' journey on foot, which he is. I send Drazha news of any likely move against him. There is going to be another in four or five days from now. A big one.'

'What about the run of Mashan's men?'

'They are nearly all poverty-stricken, and he pays them well. I don't think many of them really have their hearts in what they are doing, or even know exactly how much they are harming our cause. Mashan has well over a thousand officers and men all along this valley, and is by far the most powerful and dangerous enemy Drazha and the Partisans have. He will destroy Keserovitch if he does not take greater care of himself.'

'I want to get to know Mashan better,' I said.

'I would not if I were you. I should take the quickest road out of here. But, if you want an insight into the sort of man he is, and the sort of life he leads, come to dinner with us to-night. All his officers will be here. But look out, because there might be Germans too.'

Mashan seemed pleased to see me at dinner, which that night was in a café, not a stone's throw from the Germans' headquarters in Rashka. I sat on Mashan's right, at the end of a long table, and there were twenty or thirty officers present. Dangitch sat next to me.

'The man in black getting drunk at the bar is the local Gestapo chief,' he said to me, 'so don't talk. He speaks Serbian perfectly.'

I was content just to sit and listen. But I was disappointed, for Mashan did not say a word, nor did he eat. Everybody else talked at the top of his voice.

Half-way through the meal I noticed that two German soldiers had come into the café and were looking at everyone's passport. I pointed them out to Dangitch, and asked what I should do.

'Sit tight,' he said. 'Mashan will arrange it. He dare not be found with you sitting next to him.'

Arranging it was simple. When the soldiers came to me, Mashan called to the Gestapo agent near the bar.

'This man is one of my chetniks,' he said.

The Gestapo agent, in the friendliest manner, explained to the soldiers, and they went away.

After supper the officers started to sing. It was the custom of chetniks of all types to sing songs glorifying their leaders, but these outdid all the others. One song started:

> Mashan the brave, Mashan the brave
> Leads a thousand thousand brave hearts,
> But not one of his men is as brave as he.

And so on, *ad nauseam*, until eleven o'clock.

Before I left Mashan said to me: 'Have you a photograph of yourself?'

'Yes,' I replied, for Gorditch had given me two or three.

'Give it to me,' said Mashan, 'and I will get one of my chetnik passports for you. It will help you past the Germans.

Come and see me next time you are this way and you shall have it.'

On my way to sleep in Dangitch's headquarters he said: 'You see? Nobody but a madman would behave like that. Never trust him. He is friendly one minute and your enemy the next.'

After a little while, 'Do you know Captain Svetitch?' he asked.

'Captain Svetitch, who has a company of Drazha's men on the Golja Planina?'

'He.'

'I met him once when he came to see Keserovitch,' I said. 'I would very much like to talk with him. My chief object is to meet as many people as I can.'

'Then you shall go with two of my men to-morrow morning. You will have to get up early, for it is a long way, and all uphill.'

Svetitch welcomed me warmly. He was one of the few Serbs with whom I was really taken on sight. Quiet, reserved, and transparently honest, he was genuinely disturbed as to what was happening in the country. He told me that the Germans were closing in on the Golja, on all sides, in preparation for an attack.

'On you?' I asked.

'No, on Drazha Mihailovitch.'

'Is he here?'

'About ten kilometres away. I will send you to meet him to-morrow.'

# X

Golja Planina means 'bare mountain', and the country in which Svetitch had his headquarters was certainly bare and mountainous. Although it was the end of April, there were still large patches of snow, and it was very cold. Svetitch lived with his officers in a well-constructed wooden hut, sheltered from the bitter winds by a belt of trees. The hut had an open veranda, and underneath this some of his men were digging a large hole. In this hole Svetitch intended to bury all his equipment and arms that were not easily portable, since he planned to evade, and not fight off, the attack. The hut had been part of the amenities which the Government had provided shortly before the outbreak of war, to attract skiers and encourage the sport.

Not even the prospect of at last meeting Drazha Mihailovitch could blind me to the fact that, in the past few days, I had reached the peak of physical and mental exhaustion. The distance from Svetitch's headquarters to the village where Drazha Mihailovitch was established could be covered in three or four hours on foot, over patches of frozen snow, but every step was an agony of effort. I followed the guide blindly over trackless moor, dotted with clumps of trees, half fir, half deciduous. In front of us, to the west, rose in the distance the vicious mountains of Montenegro, layer behind layer, sharp-edged against the sky. The guide was in a hurry, and pressed on.

Twice we were stopped by apparently friendly armed men, neither of whom I had seen until they stepped out a few paces in front of us, one from behind a boulder, and another from a clump of trees. They were part of Drazha's two rings of sentries, said the guide.

Headquarters was in a scattered village of wooden houses.

Although the peasants were probably poorer than those in the valleys, these wooden houses were more pleasant and cleaner than the ordinary plaster ones of the valleys. They all, for instance, had floor boards. The guide pointed out the house where the staff was lodged, and left me to my own devices. A number of men were sitting about round it, and showed no particular interest in me. Popovitch, with Keserovitch's patrol, had arrived a few hours before, and no doubt they thought that I was a member of it. As I was standing, wondering whether to go in or wait, a man in peasant dress came out. He was very bronzed, and had a small moustache, but his face looked familiar.

'Jeez,' he said, in an Australian drawl, 'I'm certainly glad to see you, Chris.'

It was Ron Jones, the Australian with whom I had made my original escape.

We each had much to tell the other, and from Ron, in half an hour, I learned many things which, had I known them months before, might have made me act very differently.

Captain X, said Ron, together with two Jugoslav majors, Ostojitch and Lalatovitch, had landed by submarine on the Dalmatian coast in October 1941. After many adventures, during which they had lost both their money (most of it stolen by the Jugoslav sergeant whom they had brought as a radio operator) and their radio transmitting-set, they had arrived at Mihailovitch's headquarters on the Ravna Gora. By the time they arrived the revolution was almost over, and Drazha's original pact with the Partisans was more than half-way towards breaking down. X, in pursuance of his orders to combine all forces of resistance, immediately insisted, as a condition under which help should be given by the British to Mihailovitch, that a new pact should be made. He went himself with a deputation from Mihailovitch's staff, and superintended the negotiations.

'But', said Ron, 'it seemed obvious from the first that Ostojitch and Lalatovitch had received different instructions from their Government in London. The new agreement did not last long. Relations with the Partisans around

Ravna Gora and Chachak steadily grew worse. Neither Ostojitch nor Lalatovitch seemed concerned with making it work. It was as though the London Jugoslavs had ordered them to make it fail.'

'I heard,' I said, 'that a consignment of arms did actually arrive by plane on the Ravna Gora.'

'Quite right,' said Ron; 'one consignment, a small one, did arrive. But fighting between the communists and Mihailovitch had already broken out. I don't know who started it. But I know that there was more than one large-scale skirmish within sound of headquarters itself.'

'At this time,' I said, 'what were the relations between Mihailovitch and X?'

'Strained from the first,' Ron replied. 'You see, there were two codes. One was in the possession of X only. The Jugoslavs had another. Drazha's radio transmitting-set was not the one that had been sent from England. That, as I have said, had been lost. The one they were using was the one they have now, and it works from about five hundred pocket batteries—an impossible and unreliable contraption. Mihailovitch wanted X to part with the British code, but he, of course, refused.

'As soon as he saw that the Partisans and Drazha's men were actually fighting, X immediately cancelled all further consignments of arms. He was undoubtedly, in many ways, justified. He said that the arms would be used merely to start a civil war, and not against the Germans, and, in the first place, they undoubtedly would have been. But he was not exactly tactful about it.'

'If that was his opinion, why should he have been tactful?' I said.

'Look here,' said Ron, 'I've got nothing against X. He was a miner at Kosovska Mitrovitsa before the war, and he's a braver man than I am. I should certainly not have liked to stand up to—I almost said provoke—these Serbs, alone, on their own ground, as I have seen him do. But, if I had been in Drazha's shoes, I should certainly have been annoyed that night.'

The Germans were already closing in on the Ravna Gora, on three sides, said Ron, and the Partisans had withdrawn from Chachak, and were preparing to attack his only line of escape. Drazha was waiting for one thing—a large consignment of arms due to be dropped on the Ravna Gora by plane. X cancelled the convoy, but he did not tell Mihailovitch what he had done until twenty-four hours later, when Mihailovitch and his men had waited the whole of one bitterly cold night, with their flares burning, in expectation. On top of Mihailovitch's disappointment, X's blow was bitter. Mihailovitch was furiously angry. He was only restrained from shooting X, said Ron, by the intervention of Lalatovitch, who pointed out that, should the British hear of it, as they would, Mihailovitch would undoubtedly forfeit their friendship for ever.

That was when Drazha disbanded his forces and sent many of them into the militia, which was then being formed by Neditch.

'After we escaped from Ravna Gora,' said Ron, 'we came here. Ever since, we have been trying to re-establish our source of supply from Cairo, using the Jugoslav code. But the trouble is that nothing Yugoslav remains secret very long, and the Germans have obviously been picking up our messages. Two missions have been sent, one to Bosnia, and one here, on the Golja. The first lot were captured almost immediately, and the second lot were dropped too far south, and were picked up by Mashan Djurovitch, who handed them over to the Germans.'

'Then what exactly is Mihailovitch doing now?' I asked.

'He is building up a splendid intelligence service, for one thing,' said Ron. 'He's got thirty of these sets out all over the country, including two in Belgrade itself, and two in Slovenia. They are worked by all sorts of people, more than one by men in the service of Neditch's militia. But I don't know how much of the intelligence reaches England.

'For instance,' he continued, 'the other night a consignment of money and arms was supposed to be dropped here. But it fell across the Albanian border, which is only a few miles away, in a village which is a hundred per cent Albanian. We have had patrols out searching for the stuff, but all we have found to date is two hundred sovereigns, and a bag with "£2,000" written on it. Drazha has threatened to burn down the village if they do not hand over the rest, but he won't get it, because the Albanians will kill you for your gold teeth, and most peasants would prefer a hundred or so sovereigns to their lousy mud and lath houses.'

'Where is X, and what is he doing?'

'He lives in a village a few miles from here,' said Ron, 'and does nothing. You never saw a man more browned off. He is virtually a prisoner.'

'Can one get to see him?'

'Of course,' said Ron; 'although the old man won't like it much. Don't go this evening, because I want to go out on a hunt for sovereigns, which is a silly game, but passes the time. You have a rest, and to-morrow I'll take you there. But don't give the old man a hint that you're going. I know him better than you do, and will persuade him when I get back.'

Ron and I went inside headquarters, a large wooden house with four rooms. There, the officers lived largely as Keserovitch's had, sleeping on straw on the floor. There were a number of them sitting at a table, playing cards and listening to the wireless. Two of them I knew from the battle of Kraljevo. There was no sign of Popovitch, who, I understood, was in conference with Ostojitch, and Stanimir had not yet arrived.

In the evening I saw Ostojitch, and talked with him for half an hour about our activities in Toplitsa. I could not understand the coolness with which he received me and listened to what I had to say, until later I learned that Popovitch had spent some time in queering my pitch. I never discovered what it was that he told Ostojitch and Drazha about us, but I gathered that it must have been both damning and convincing.

Towards evening it came on to rain, and I was glad that I had not gone out with Ron on patrol. I slept on the straw with the other officers.

Shortly after midnight, Stanimir arrived. He was wet through, and in a bad temper. His journey had taken him from Trstenik to Gornje Milanovats, and from there a hundred miles across difficult country, until he had at last found Svetitch. In those days it was difficult even for Drazha's own men to find their way to his headquarters.

Stanimir and I relit the stove, and dried his clothes. When I told him the result of my interview with Kosta Pechanats he was pleased and immensely excited.

'We must go back at once to Toplitsa,' he said, 'for you will have started developments which will need all our strength to control.'

He also brought news that the attack on the Golja was imminent. The Germans and several companies of Neditchites were massing on the north and east, along the Morava and Ibar valleys.

'It will not come to anything,' he added, 'because most of the Neditchites, except Mashan, are Drazha's men in disguise.'

At first light the whole of headquarters began to buzz with activity. Everywhere men were packing up.

'If you want to see Drazha Mihailovitch', said Ron, 'you had better see him this morning. Before midday he will be off.'

'What about going to see X?' I asked.

'He has already gone.'

In the light of the things which I had heard the day before, this was a blow to my hopes. The only concrete fact that I had learned for my future guidance was that Drazha's policy was not dictated by the British, but was concocted on the spot, under the guidance of Ostojitch and Lalatovitch. I resolved, in future, to take less notice of the British radio, and to follow, with great caution, my own nose.

That morning I met Mihailovitch. I was shocked at his appearance, for he looked an old man, though I knew his age to be between forty-five and fifty. He was small and slight, with grey hair, a thin, lined face, and gold-rimmed spectacles. His voice was tired, and he spoke with a worried,

preoccupied abstraction. He told me that he had already read Radevitch's dispatches, and that he was sincerely heartened by them.

He also gave me an account of his difference with X, which was substantially the same as the versions which I had already heard.

'I know,' he said, 'that my policy at the end of last year and the beginning of this seems to be open to criticism. Perhaps, especially to you, because you cannot understand the intricacies of Serbian politics. I consider that I did the only thing possible at the time. X nearly destroyed me by cutting off my supply of arms. You see, we had agreed with the Partisans in September that they should supply us with half the arms which they manufactured at Uzhitsa. In three months they made more than four thousand rifles. But we never saw one. Then they accused me of not passing to them half of the one consignment which I received from you British. Naturally I refused to part with it.

'But, when X told me that no more would come, I knew that for the time being I was finished. There was nothing I could do. I felt that at all costs I must keep some of my companies intact. That is why I sent them to serve with Neditch. I did not want to do it. Neditch has always been my enemy, even when he was War Minister and I a colonel on the General Staff.

'I hate keeping men there, in the militia. But, even now, I could not exist without them. They protect me, both from the Germans and from the Partisans. No movement by either passes without my knowing, and for that thanks are largely due to my Neditchites.'

With pride he spoke of his system of radio transmitting-sets, established throughout Jugoslavia. 'Not one of those sets came from England,' he said. 'Some of them were Jugoslav Army sets, but most of them we have made. Is it not an achievement?'

'But why,' I asked, 'now that your organization is improving again, is Keserovitch, for instance, forbidden to take action against the Germans?'

'You have heard', said Mihailovitch, 'of the result of my revolution last autumn, in which you took part? Of the hundreds of villages burned and the terrible reprisals that the Germans inflicted on our innocent people? It was a massacre. When it was over and, with God's help, I was preserved to continue the struggle, I resolved that I would never again bring such misery on the country, unless it could result in total liberation.

'We cannot, for the moment, maintain large illegal guerrilla companies. The misery which they cause to the peasants is too great. Here, where my headquarters is, for instance, we have been only a short time, but already we have depleted the stocks of food on the Golja so much that the peasants will almost starve until the harvest. All that the country has to spare, and still more, is taken by the Germans and Partisans. It is far better that my men should stay at home, work on the land, and look after their weapons, if they have them. When the day comes for us to rise, we will rise. With my present organization, I could raise a large proportion of the country in a week. When it is complete, it will be a matter of forty-eight hours or less.'

'Then, until Germany's final collapse, you intend to do nothing more active than organize?'

'I did not say that. I said, until the Germans are too weak to deploy sufficient forces against us to retake what we shall have taken from them. In future, I do not intend to capture a town until I know that I can protect its inhabitants.'

'But meanwhile, what of the Partisans?' I asked.

'I have twice come to an understanding with them, and twice they have deceived me. I shall not attack them; indeed, I cannot, because my men are not mobilized. But I shall always defend myself against them, for I consider that my organization is equally important to theirs. Have you,' asked Mihailovitch, 'ever met in his own house a peasant, in the whole of the year during which you have been with us, who was a communist?'

'Never,' I said, for that was the truth; 'never, except with the Partisans.'

'If I thought that the country wanted their politics, I would willingly place myself under their orders,' said

Mihailovitch, 'but, until then, I shall continue to oppose them.'

We chatted for some time about the general war situation, and Mihailovitch told me that while he was serving on the Salonika front in the last war he was awarded the M.C. 'It was awarded by the British command to the Division, and we voted for it,' he said. 'I received the most votes.'

I was surprised that the British radio had never made this interesting propaganda point, and suggested that Mihailovitch should remind them to make it. As I rose to leave, he said: 'Why are the British fighting the Germans on only one small front?'

'Because they are not ready to start another,' I replied, somewhat taken aback.

'That', said Mihailovitch, 'is why I have ordered that none of my commanders shall, for the moment, attack the Germans. We are not ready.'

A few hours later Mihailovitch left, with only two companions, on the start of his journey to establish a new headquarters in Montenegro. As he passed from sight, walking slowly along a faint mountain path, I thought that he looked almost a pathetic figure, with his brown peasant's clothes, bareheaded, and carrying only a heavy ash stick.

Stanimir and I left during the afternoon, to make our way towards Rashka. Stanimir had a friend there, with whom he wished to speak before going further. He seemed, indeed, to have friends everywhere. I asked him whether he intended to contact Keserovitch on the way.

'No,' he replied. 'We shall travel by train to Trstenik, if my friend at Rashka thinks that it is safe enough. We shall not pass near the Kopaonik. In any case, I have no time. I must report back.'

Headquarters troops were splitting into groups and setting out in different directions, since it would be easier to slip through the German cordon in small groups than in large. On the way to Rashka, Stanimir and I fell in with the men of one of Svetitch's platoons, who were going to cross the Ibar above Rashka. For safety, we spent the night on the open hillside with them. Mashan, we learned, had the previous day set out with the Germans for the Golja. Rashka would be safe for us, for not many of his men were left there.

We had a meal with Stanimir's friend, at a house on the outskirts of the town, and shortly after midday caught a train for Kraljevo. I was interested to see how the Germans could have repaired the bridge which we had blown six months earlier. My delight can be imagined when I discovered that they had not been able to do so. The train drew up on the south side of the bridge, and everyone climbed down and crossed a tiny footbridge, erected over the ruins. There was a train already waiting on the north side to take us on. Stanimir was amused and sympathetic at my excitement, but advised me not to show it too much.

Our train completed the journey so slowly that Stanimir and I began to grow anxious. There were long stops between the few stations. By the time we reached Matarushke Banje, a few miles south of Kraljevo, it had long been dark. Because we did not wish to spend the night on Kraljevo station and, possibly, be questioned by Germans as to our reason for being there, we descended at Matarushke Banje, where we hoped to find somewhere to sleep before continuing into Kraljevo on foot in the morning.

Matarushke Banje was the one place where Stanimir had no friends. The ferry that might have taken us across the Ibar into Mataruge on the far side, where he had friends, had stopped working for the night. There was no alternative but to knock up the proprietor of the café, and sleep with our heads on a table.

We chose the smallest café of the three which are there, and beat on the door. The proprietor, a gross man with breeches and bare feet, opened grumpily, and gave us some *rakija* and bread and cheese. Then he left us.

Shortly after several chetniks came in, and sat down at tables near us, looking at us curiously. A man who seemed to be their leader walked over to our table and confronted us. Behind him, the rest moved in a body towards us, and, before we were fully aware of any hostile move, we found that we were looking down the barrels of half a dozen rifles.

There was a click as one of the men released his safety catch. Knowing that nearly all chetniks kept a round permanently 'up the spout', I began to feel a pricking sensation at the roots of the hair.

Stanimir, however, was not in the least perturbed. 'What is all this nonsense?' he asked the leader.

'I want to see your papers,' said the man, surlily.

'To see *my* papers?' said Stanimir in a terrible voice. 'To see *my* papers? Don't you know who *I* am? Go and tell your *vojvoda* that you have asked to see the papers of Stanimir Radenkovitch and see what he says. Put those rifles down, you fools, and stop being children!'

It must have been unusual for anyone challenged by that particular chetnik to act with such aplomb, for he was very much taken aback. I saw the rifle barrels waver as Stanimir's tirade progressed, and finally the butts came to rest on the ground. He cursed their mothers, their children, and their grandparents. He produced Gorditch's passport and waved it in their faces. Finally, driving them in front of him, he advanced towards the door. He did not stop shouting until the last one was outside and the door locked.

He turned back into the room just in time to see the café proprietor slipping out by another door. He ran after him, led him back by the ear, and administered three or four hearty kicks on the man's ample backside. 'That will teach you to meddle in things which have nothing to do with you,' he said.

I asked whether the men might not recover from his spell, once they were outside, and bring reinforcements.

'Not they,' said Stanimir. 'The Mataruge company is one of Bogdan Gorditch's. Their *vojvoda* knows who I am. If they tell him of their night's work, they will wish they had not.'

For the rest of the night, we slumbered uncomfortably but undisturbed.

Kraljevo station still bore the scars of the autumn's fighting. On all the secondary routes in Jugoslavia they were already using cattle-trucks for passenger traffic, because most of the carriages had been taken for German troop-trains. The guards who boarded our train were from one of Gorditch's companies, and they passed Stanimir without question, and took his word for me.

We did not pause at Trstenik, but there we parted. I told Stanimir that I was going to Alexandrovats to collect my suit, and that I might very well stay there two or three days for a rest.

At Alexandrovats I stayed with Lika Milkovitch, in a little house which he had had built, away from the town, in his vineyard. He was a tall, pale young man, who suffered from tuberculosis. I thought that, with the difficulty the war had brought in obtaining treatment, the disease would soon kill him. His sister, a pretty girl of about twenty, was already bedridden with it.

The fourth of May was St. George's Day, and a national religious holiday, and, in spite of the war, on that day Alexandrovats was very festive. I looked out over the village street from my retreat in the vineyard, and wished I could have been there. Lika described the service to me: how the priest, wearing white robes embroidered heavily in blue and purple, would stand in front of the altar and intone the special prayers. The congregation did not sit, but stood in the body of the church and, when it was over, formed into a line, and filed past the priest, as he stood holding the Bible. Each one knelt and kissed the Bible, and the hand with which he held it.

In Serbia every household has a patron saint, and when the saint's day comes the whole family takes a holiday for three days, and open house is kept. There are good things to eat for everyone at all times of day, and coffee is served continuously. On each of the three evenings, special friends are invited for a repast, at which everyone is merry and there is plenty of wine and *rakija.*

During the three days of celebration, Lika was fully occupied, for St. George was his patron saint, and I was left alone to wander in the vineyard and the woods beyond. During this time I evolved a new plan. It seemed to me evident that things would never start moving in Jugoslavia until X could reopen communications in his own code. This

he might never do with the use of Mihailovitch's radio. But, if one transmitting-set could be made, surely Toplitsa must contain, somewhere, experts both to assemble and work another. I resolved that I would first persuade Radevitch to help me find experts to do this, and then make yet another journey to Mihailovitch's headquarters. This time I would let nothing stand in the way of my interview with X. I would find him, and tell him that we had a radio set in Toplitsa. Ron Jones had said that X was 'browned off'. I thought that I could probably persuade him to give Drazha Mihailovitch the slip and come back with us to Toplitsa.

Now, in Toplitsa we had places, far from any important highway, where I thought that an aeroplane might land. Sokolovitsa, for instance, where Kosta Pechanats had landed in 1917, was in the middle of our territory, and a full five hours' march, over roads impassable to transport, from Kurshumlje, which was the nearest town. Sokolovitsa seemed ideally situated to start a little British headquarters, under the protection of Radevitch's organization, through which regular communication, safe in the hands of Englishmen, could be reopened.

Immediately I had reached this decision I felt happier. The very next day I set out to find Radevitch in Toplitsa. I resolved, first, to enlist Ivanovitch and Milenkovitch to help carry the plan through. I knew that they would be both enthusiastic and sanguine.

My uniform was finished, and I collected it from the tailor. Lika gave me a new shirt and tie, and I felt a different man when I put them on.

It seemed, at first, as though providence was working on my side. At Blatse I found Milenkovitch. He had been working, in his usual manner, in the villages around, and had eventually contacted the local *vojvoda,* the successor to the notorious priest Mika and the Albanian Dushan. This new *vojvoda* was a sergeant of the old regular gendarmerie, who had at first refused to serve under the German occupation. At the request of the people of the town, and seeing their distress, he had finally accepted the unwelcome task of reducing the chaos of Blatse to law and order. He had worked with commendable success. He had re-formed the whole company of chetniks, and chased Mika's bad eggs for ever from the town. For the first time since the occupation, Blatse was now enjoying a measure of tranquillity.

Milenkovitch had contacted him first through one of our agents. The *vojvoda* was not only willing not to interfere, but in the humblest manner begged to be told in what way he could be of active assistance. Milenkovitch gave him the usual orders, and was about to leave when the *vojvoda* said:

'Mika has left a storeroom of Jugoslav Army equipment which the Germans gave him for use against the Partisans. I keep it locked, for I have no use for it. Would you like to take it over?'

He led Milenkovitch to a small storeroom in the building which had been the headquarters of the local gendarmerie, and opened the door.

'And', said Milenkovitch, telling me the story, 'there are two heavy machine-guns, three or four boxes of belt ammunition, five L.M.G.s, and two cases of hand-grenades. There was a lot of other junk too, things like radio transmitting-sets——'

'Things like *what*?' I said.

'Radio transmitting-sets. Ones that used to be used in our signal corps. There were two of them complete, the sergeant said. Only they're no use without the batteries.'

'Listen,' I said; 'Drazha Mihailovitch works his from five hundred pocket batteries, wired together. I don't know anything about electricity, but I imagine that if he can work his we could certainly work those.'

I then told Milenkovitch of the plan I had thought out for establishing our own centre of communications. As I had imagined, his version of the ramifications of it stretched very much farther than mine. He built rapturous castles in the air for about thirty minutes, and finished: 'Why, man, we shall become the most important people in Jugoslavia!'

He and Ivanovitch had had a very successful meeting with the Partisan leaders. The two had been (for them)

fairly frank about their intentions, and had put it to the Partisans that there were in Toplitsa many peasants whom we could organize in the name of Mihailovitch, but who would never have anything to do with anyone who called himself a communist. The leaders agreed that they would work hand-in-hand with us, and that they would be willing, from time to time, to meet members of our staff, as well as retain permanently with them Dragomir Lastitch as our representative.

This was a very real step forward, for it meant that on the tactically important mountain called the Jastrevats, which commanded the town of Krushevats, we had instead of an enemy a powerful ally who would safeguard the northern flank of our organization.

The next day Milenkovitch and I set out together for Radevitch's headquarters, which was at that time right in the south of our territory, in the foothills of the Sokolovitsa.

As we were walking along a road, a few hours from Blatse, we noticed a peasant driving an ox-wagon. Milenkovitch was, as usual, wearing his *shubara,* and carrying a huge Luger automatic.

When the peasant drew abreast of us he stopped the wagon, got down, and, to our surprise, knelt, facing us, and placed his forehead in the dust.

'Hey, what is all this, friend?' asked Milenkovitch. 'Who do you think we are, gods?'

'No, Gospodine *Vojvoda,*' replied the peasant. But you are a *vojvoda,*' and he bowed again.

'Get up', said Milenkovitch, quietly, 'and tell me what is the matter with you. I am not accustomed to meeting madmen on the road.'

The peasant got up and faced us, holding his hat in his hand. He looked very frightened.

'Now,' said Milenkovitch, 'tell us why you bowed down.'

'I do not like to, Gospodine *Vojvoda.* Truly, I am afraid to.'

'I am not a *vojvoda,*' said Milenkovitch impatiently, 'nor am I a chetnik. Calm yourself. Tell me what made you do that.'

'No, you are pleased to joke,' said the peasant. 'I know you are a *vojvoda* by your clothes and beard.'

'Curse all chetniks,' said Milenkovitch. 'I am an officer of Drazha Mihailovitch, and of the Jugoslav Army of the Fatherland. Now, will you tell me why you did that?'

'Well, Gospodine,' said the peasant, 'one day I was driving my oxen along this very road, and I met the Gospodine *vojvoda,* Priest Mika. As I passed him he shouted at me and asked why had I not saluted him properly.

' "God is my witness, Gospodine *Vojvoda,*" I said, "I did salute."

' "You did not salute," shouted the *vojvoda.*

' "As God is my witness," I said, "I did salute. I took off my hat."

' "Take that man off the wagon and beat him," shouted the *vojvoda* to his men. And, Gospodine,' said the peasant, 'they gave me twenty-five strokes.

'Then the priest said: "When you see me, you will bow yourself to the ground. For I am the saviour of this people."

'So, now, Gospodine,' said the peasant, 'whenever I see a man who I think is a *vojvoda,* I always bow myself to the ground. For that does not hurt me, and I do not want twenty-five strokes for nothing again. I could not walk for a week.'

'Listen,' said Milenkovitch to the man; 'the time is coming when all those sins shall be paid for. Priest Mika is dead, and he died too quickly. I tell you that all the other *vojvode* will ask to be killed, rather than bear the things which we shall do to them. Ah, there is a fate in store for them!

'Now,' he added more quietly to the peasant, 'go on your way, and remember, that there is not a person in the country who is worthy to kiss your feet. For you are a peasant, and the father of the people.

'Curse my mother, that I was born a Serb!' said Milenkovitch to me, when the peasant had gone. 'Do you not see how we are a corrupt people? But there will be a reckoning.'

At the southern extremity of our territory, a good day's march from Blatse, was a village called Kurshumliske

Banje, where there was a hot spring, and a small hotel which was now deserted except for a caretaker. It was only a few miles from the Albanian border. There we hoped to find Ivanovitch and Radevitch. But by the time we arrived they had moved on. We had a bath in the most expensive of the three bath-houses. The water was very sulphurous. It was the first hot bath, in a proper bath, and not a shower, that I had had since I had left Cairo for Crete. It was also my last for nearly three years.

Afterwards we went a little way into the hills, to a peasant's house, to sleep. When the peasant showed us our room Milenkovitch said: 'If the Albanians attack across the border in the night, do you fight them off, or run away?'

'It is a good many months since they tried it,' said the peasant, 'but, if they do, we shall put up the best fight we can.'

'Good,' said Milenkovitch. 'That means I can take my trousers off when I go to bed. A man can always fight without his trousers, but he needs to be wearing them if he is going to run away.'

We found all the remaining members of the staff gathered at a near-by village. We immediately went into conference and each of us made a report on what he had done. Ivanovitch and Milenkovitch related how, the day after I had been with Kosta Pechanats, he had come to Kurshumlje in his staff car. He had, through Milan his son, sent for Milenkovitch, and had had a long conversation with him. Milan had impressed him with the strength of our organization, and Kosta had been conciliatory. He had taken Milenkovitch with him to Prokuplje, and, in his presence, had ordered Bukvitch to give us all the aid we required. They had then come back to Kurshumlje together, where he had given Marijanitch similar orders.

'But', said Milenkovitch, 'that does not alter the fact that, as soon as our military organization gets under way, Kosta must be destroyed, and most of his *vojvode.*'

'I am very surprised', I said, 'that you allowed yourself to be taken into Prokuplje by that old fifth-columnist. Supposing he had handed you straight over to the Germans?'

'I still had my automatic,' replied Milenkovitch. 'If he had stopped at the Gestapo headquarters I should have shot him dead. That would have been one brigand the less, whatever might have happened to me.'

I then gave a brief account of the things which I had done, most of which Stanimir had already reported.

'And now,' I said, 'you talk of destroying Kosta Pechanats. Here I have the instrument.' And I handed to Radevitch Kosta's order to Mashan Djurovitch, which was in his own handwriting and read:

'The bearer of this letter is an Englishman, in the service of Drazha Mihailovitch. Please give him what aid you can. In addition, it is my request that you should not interfere with any of Drazha Mihailovitch's officers and men, provided that they are not serving with the Partisans. This includes Major Keserovitch, at present in the Kopaonik.' It was signed, 'Pechanats, Vojvoda.'

'When the time comes,' I added, 'all you have to do is to see that this document falls into the hands of the Germans. It will destroy their confidence in Pechanats, and it will also give Mashan something to think about.'

Radevitch was overjoyed. 'We shall be ready for this in a month or two,' he said. 'If that old man takes to the hills again, the hardship will kill him, if the Partisans do not.'

The time had come, in the two provinces in which we had been chiefly working, to appoint those of our military commanders for whom there were vacancies, and to work out the details of their organization. Ivanovitch had already been in touch with many of his friends in Belgrade who would supply such men as we had not been able to find locally.

So far our agents in the villages had reported a total of twelve hundred peasants who had rifles and ammunition. We reckoned that there were two thousand more, who were at present unarmed, but who would be willing to serve in an emergency. The work of organization was considerable, for it meant having a detailed mobilization plan that would

not take too long to put into effect. For several days we struggled over Milenkovitch's maps, on which he had written a lot of little numbers, indicating the approximate numbers of men whom we could draw from each village. We decided to leave it to the local commanders to choose the exact spot for a rendezvous, and for battalion commanders, of whom, at the moment, two had been appointed, to work out the battalion rendezvous.

While we were in the middle of these deliberations there arrived from the village of Stubal, not far south of Blatse, important news which demanded our immediate attention. One of Vukovitch's men arrived on horseback with a letter from Vukovitch, which said that the Germans had been to Stubal, examined such stocks of wheat as there were there (they had already been seriously depleted), and demanded immediately that a further two thousand kilograms should be taken to Prokuplje and handed over to the German commissariat there.

'On what day is the wheat to be delivered?' Ivanovitch asked the messenger.

'May 15,' he replied.

'Good,' said Ivanovitch. 'I have been waiting for this. I have a plan to save that convoy, at least.'

'Will the convoy be guarded by chetniks or Germans?' he asked the messenger.

'By neither,' replied the man. 'A detachment of the Fifth Militia Company, from Kurshumlje, is to go with it.'

'Better and better,' said Ivanovitch, and he sent the messenger away.

'This is what we must do,' he said, when the man had gone. 'One of us must find Vukovitch without delay. We shall need twenty of his men. Another must go to Kurshumlje and find out which of the officers will be in charge of the convoy. Tell him to pick his men carefully. We must see that it does not come along the main road through Kurshumlje, but goes direct across country under the Jastrevats. There we will stage a mock battle. It will mean the wasting of a few rounds, but that is better than losing two tons of wheat. The guard will return to Kurshumlje, straggling, in twos and threes, and one or two must disappear. That will be easy to manage, for they can join our staff here for a little while, or, if they like, they can go home.

'We shall have to kill one of the oxen to make a show, and leave one of the wagons there, if possible, knocked about.

'The Fifth Militia men will report that an overwhelming force of Partisans attacked them and carried off the wheat. What in fact will happen will be that Vukovitch's men will take it into the woods at the foot of the Jastrevats, where they will lie up until nightfall, and then return it to Stubal, where it will be hidden.

'The Germans will perfectly well believe that it is the work of the Partisans, especially if, as I suggest, one or two of the militiamen are reported killed, and do not appear again in Kurshumlje. There will be no reprisals, because no Germans will have been killed. And, even if they do make another requisition to take its place, it will mean that we shall have delayed delivery, and every kilogram of wheat which we can deny them is important.'

We all thought the plan perfect. Radevitch again took command, and he quickly allotted to each of the staff a task. He and Stanimir were to go into Stubal and superintend the loading of the wheat. It would have to travel on four ox-wagons. Milenkovitch and Ivanovitch were to go to Vukovitch and explain what was needed of his men, and I received orders to go down into Kurshumlje immediately, and make sure that the right officers and men were chosen from the Fifth Company of Militia.

I set out immediately. As I approached Kurshumlje I was challenged by a member of Milan's chetnik company. I showed him the pass that Milan had given me.

As he was reading it, two Bulgarian soldiers, who had evidently been posted on the road to act as supplementary sentries, strolled up and looked at it over his shoulder.

'Ah, hullo,' said the chetnik to me, in the friendliest manner, 'you are the Englishman we have been hearing about.' He had not noticed the Bulgars.

I reached forward and took the pass from his hand and, as I did so, said 'Good afternoon' loudly to the two Bulgarian soldiers.

The chetnik turned round and saw them, and his jaw dropped.

'Englishman?' I said, and laughed. 'I wish I were!'

'Is this man English?' said one of the Bulgars to the chetnik.

'No,' said the chetnik, 'it is a joke. We call him that because he is so rich. He comes from Slovenia, he is a refugee.'

'Where have you come from?' said the Bulgar, who spoke reasonable Serb.

'From Kurshumliske Banje,' I said.

'And what were you doing there?'

'Carrying a message from Milan Pechanats to the *vojvoda* there.'

'What is the message?' asked the Bulgar.

'He wanted to borrow two horses, so that he could go to Blatse and back in a day,' I replied.

'It is foolish to make jokes like that,' said the Bulgar to the chetnik. 'See how you have wasted my time.'

I passed on into the town in a chastened mood.

I found one of the militia in the café where Milenkovitch and I had slept, and sent him with a message to the Russian Captain. When he came, I asked him if they had received orders to provide a guard for the wheat that was to be delivered to Prokuplje.

'Yes,' he said, 'on May 15.'

'Which of your officers is going?'

'I think I shall go myself,' he said.

'How many men will you take?' I asked.

'Only five. We shall be on the main road all the way.'

I then told him our plan, and he was enthusiastic about it.

'Can you find ten reliable men for the guard?' I asked.

'Easily.'

'It will look better if you have ten,' I said.

'As a matter of fact,' said the Russian, 'we have been trying to get more ammunition out of the Germans for some time, and this will give us an excuse. They have refused to let us have more than thirty rounds per man. We shall be able to point out that you cannot defend yourself against the Partisans with thirty rounds.'

I showed, on the map, the route he was to take. It was, on paper, the quickest route from Stubal to Prokuplje, and it passed right through the foothills of the Jastrevats.

'Of course,' said the Captain, 'what we usually do is to come to Kurshumlje and spend the night here, and then go on in the morning. I shall have to say that we took that route in order to save time.'

I slept that night in the café, and early next day set out for Stubal. Stanimir and Radevitch had already arrived there. Only the minimum number of peasants had been allowed to know of the plan, and even they did not know how it was going to be worked. They were a little afraid of reprisals. But the thought of saving their wheat made them willing to risk that.

Stanimir had found the crumbliest old wagon in the village, and quite the oldest, hungriest and most diseased ox I had ever seen, to act as our 'casualties'. By the 14th of May everything was ready. Milenkovitch arrived with the news that Vukovitch's men were already on their way to their position. They had seven ponies, on which we hoped to carry away some of the wheat from the wagon which would have to be broken up.

In the evening a German patrol arrived by car to examine the wheat and make sure that they had the right amount. They were very surprised to find that they had, for it was the first time that they had not had to make up the quantity by force. But when they had counted the bags, and weighed some of them, they went away again.

Early in the morning of the 15th, we set out with the convoy, the militiamen walking alongside the four wagons, which were only very lightly loaded. We had timed ourselves to arrive at the place fixed for the ambush late in the afternoon, for we did not want to have to lie up in the woods to wait for dark for more than a few hours, and we thought, moreover, that it would not be safe to have Germans or

Bulgars arrive on the scene to investigate with more than an hour or two of daylight left.

An ox-wagon is the slowest kind of wheeled transport under the sun, and the kilometres dragged by. But we did not hurry the beasts, and it was nearly six before we arrived. Ivanovitch and Vukovitch met us, and explained exactly where his men were. The spot was well chosen. There was a hard track, where our wheelmarks would not show too much, leading off towards the Jastrevats.

When we came to the place we stopped, and the last three wagons made off up the hillside towards the woods. The first wagon, the crumbly one, was unloaded on to one of the other three and on to Vukovitch's ponies. The good ox in it was unyoked and led off back along the road, the way we had come. Then the battle started.

Vukovitch had posted his men in proper positions, so that, if the Germans investigated the spot, they would find empty cartridge-cases there. The Russian Captain had brought a light machine-gun 'for good measure'. 'You can capture it if you like,' he said. 'The Germans will have to find us another if you do.'

Vukovitch accepted this proposal with alacrity. For ten minutes we let off our rifles and occasional bursts from the L.M.G. into the air, and Milenkovitch exploded a couple of hand-grenades, one of which nearly killed Stanimir and Radevitch. The Russian Captain shot the old ox through the head, and we pushed the wagon into a ditch at the side of the road, where one of the wheels broke off in a picturesque manner of its own accord. We also put a few bullet-holes through it, and shot the ox in several more places. Then we shook hands with the militiamen, and they made off in different directions. Two of them stayed with us. These were to be the 'dead and wounded' whom the Captain would report missing.

As soon as it grew dark we led the ponies and the three wagons back to Stubal by a different route. Then Radevitch and the rest of the staff went home to Vukovitch's village, where we could get on with our planning and await developments.

Two days later, the Russian Captain came out from Kurshumlje and told us that he had personally handed in his report to the German commandant at Nish. He had waded in with both hands, and lodged a complaint that the company was terribly short of ammunition, and had not sufficient men to undertake duties of the kind they had been given. The German commandant had been most sympathetic, and had promised that their armament would be immediately reinforced. So far, nobody who mattered suspected the truth, and there was no likelihood of reprisals.

Thus our first action in Toplitsa ended in complete success.

# XI

While we had been waiting for the Russian Captain's report, I had put to Radevitch my plan for going to Mihailovitch's headquarters and he had agreed that it was the best thing we could do. Now that Mihailovitch was as far away as Montenegro, communication with him, unless we could get our radio working, would be impossible.

I could see that the thing which appealed to them all most about my plan was the kudos which would accrue to them from being, as it were, the possessors of the chief means of communication with Britain, for if X could be persuaded to join us we should, in effect, be more powerful than Mihailovitch, and no doubt we should be the first to be supplied with arms.

But my motive was different. If X could persuade the British to send a plane to our part of the world, I should be the first to step on to it and ask to be taken home. I felt that, for the time being, I had had enough of Jugoslavia. Moreover, I believed that Drazha Mihailovitch's organization was not strong enough to cope with the Partisans if they really became obstreperous, and that, in any case, the present state of the country was none other than one of civil war.

It was imperative that the British should be informed of as much of the true situation as I could give. From the news and propaganda that was coming over the radio from London, it was obvious that the intelligence that was reaching them was little better than it had been before and during the autumn revolution.

Meanwhile Ivanovitch privately had told me that he wished to get into direct touch with Partisan headquarters. He had already obtained from the commandant on the Jastrevats a letter of introduction to the Partisan Chief of Staff, who was at that time in the Bosnian hills. It would be a long journey, and would take us more than a month. This time, said Ivanovitch, it was Milenkovitch who would have to come with me, for Stanimir did not yet know the extent of our connection with the Partisans, and Radevitch must not be allowed to know that we were in touch with the Partisan headquarters until it was a *fait accompli*. We were to attempt to contact Partisan headquarters only after we had seen Mihailovitch.

Radevitch was easily persuaded to let Milenkovitch make the journey with me to Drazha Mihailovitch's new headquarters, especially as Stanimir would in the next month or two have some work which only he could do, in the district around his native village.

Lengthy dispatches were prepared by Radevitch for Mihailovitch and secretly by Ivanovitch for the Partisans. Milenkovitch carried those addressed to Mihailovitch, and I took the ones for the Partisans. I carried them, as usual, bound to my legs underneath my puttees.

We set out on what proved to be our last journey on the 21st of May 1942. At first, everything went very easily. We crossed the watershed into Keserovitch's country in the Kopaonik, bypassed Brus, and arrived at night at the house of Moskovljevitch. There we learned that Peter Maynard and Denis Boon had left Brus, and had set out on their own also to find Mihailovitch.

The next day, as we set out for Keserovitch's headquarters, for we had messages for him, a peculiar thing happened to me. I had a blackout and fainted. We were some way from Moskovljevitch's house, and before I had arrived back there it had happened again. This alarmed both me and Milenkovitch, and we decided that it would be better to have a few days' rest before going on.

On the 30th of May we set out again, and this time reached Keserovitch's headquarters without trouble.

Keserovitch was more arrogant and unpleasant than ever, and Popovitch and Radiuje were openly hostile. They received our messages from Radevitch with bad grace, and (this was fortunate both for us and for them) declined to give us any messages for Mihailovitch. Keserovitch was in a permanent bad temper, because his radio set was not working and he was no longer in direct touch with Mihailovitch.

'You will, of course, swim across the Ibar,' said Keserovitch, as we left.

'Why should we?' said Milenkovitch.

'Because of Mashan Djurovitch. He has posted patrols all the way between Joshanichke Banje and the river, and you won't be able to get across the bridge.'

'Thank you,' said Milenkovitch, 'for the information.'

We lunched with a peasant not far from Joshanichke Banje. He did us very well, and we both drank slightly more *rakija* than was wise.

As we left his house, it came on to rain, in a thin, persistent drizzle. 'We will get across the Ibar,' said Milenkovitch, 'and then find somewhere to spend the night. I don't intend to go far in this foul weather.'

It was certainly miserable. Not even the *rakija* we had inside us could cheer us up.

'Do you intend that we should swim the river?' I asked.

'I don't think it will be necessary,' said Milenkovitch. 'We'll have a good look at the bridge before we come to it. Is there a village there?'

'Yes,' I answered. 'It is called Biljanovats.'

'This side or the other?' he asked.

'This side,' I replied.

'Good,' said Milenkovitch. 'If I know anything about Mashan's patrols, they'll be in the nearest café and not on the bridge at all, especially on an afternoon like this.'

We made good progress towards the bridge and avoided Joshanichke Banje. As we came within sight of it a thought struck me.

'What is the date?' I asked.

'The 1st of June,' replied Milenkovitch.

'Exactly a year ago to-day I was captured by the Germans,' I said.

The bridge seemed deserted, but there was no way of approaching it except through the village of Biljanovats.

'We'll pass through quickly,' said Milenkovitch. 'Probably nobody will see us.'

We negotiated the village without seeing anybody, and had almost reached the bridge when three men in the uniform of Mashan's chetniks came out of a little hut. They stopped us and asked for our passports, which were, of course, not in order. The sergeant of this patrol asked Milenkovitch: 'Where are you going?'

'To Rashka,' he replied.

'And what do you want there?'

'We have messages for Mashan Djurovitch.'

'Mashan is not at Rashka. To-day he has been to Kraljevo. He will pass through here in a few minutes on his way to Joshanichke Banje, where he will spend the night. If you want to see him you had better wait here.'

'Our orders,' said Milenkovitch, 'are to proceed immediately to Rashka.'

'I cannot allow you to,' said the sergeant. 'For one thing the Germans would almost certainly detain you, with these passports.'

He called two more men from the post, and told them to take us back to the café and stay there with us. 'He will not be long,' said the sergeant, who still had our papers, such as they were. 'But I am afraid I must insist that you wait.'

There were a number of Djurovitch's soldiers in the café, and we sat down at a table and ordered a carafe of wine. It was a very cold day for the time of year, and we were wet through.

'What shall we do now?' said Milenkovitch. 'Presumably we could start a battle and get out of here. But we should lose our passports if we did that.'

'There's no need to be particularly worried,' I said. 'I have talked to Mashan before, and presumably can do so again.'

'Let me have a crack at him with my Luger as he comes in,' said Milenkovitch wistfully; 'I can probably let off a couple of shots or so and get out of the window before these geese here realize what is happening.'

'Don't be an idiot, man,' I said. 'I tell you there is no need for that sort of thing. If we wanted to assassinate Mashan we should arrange it properly, and plan it beforehand. Personally I'm in favour, but this is neither the time nor the place.'

'It seems to me an ideal opportunity,' said Milenkovitch. 'Right on his own doorstep. I bet we could get away with it.'

'I am not in the mood to try,' I said. 'We have always talked our way out of things before, so there's no reason why we should not again.'

Milenkovitch, much to my relief, allowed himself to be persuaded. I could not prevent a feeling of ill omen as we waited. There was something gloomy about the day. The café was a poor one, with wooden tables, varnished brown but ill kept. The floor was dirty and so were the chetniks who stood at the serving-counter. It was still raining and, though it could have been little past six o'clock, already it seemed to be growing dark.

Presently a car drew up outside. The sergeant who had detained us went outside to meet it. Then Mashan Djurovitch appeared and stood in the doorway glowering at us.

'What a shot,' murmured Milenkovitch, 'a recruit's shot.'

Mashan's face was like thunder. His brows were drawn down and he was biting his lips. He was closely followed by the two men who always accompanied him. They were a sort of permanent bodyguard. He strode towards us.

'Who are you?' he asked, 'and where do you come from?'

I stood up. 'Gospodine *Vojvoda,*' I said, 'you know me very well. I am from the company of Milan Pechanats, of Kurshumlje. I am a Slovene, and have met you on several occasions.'

He glanced at me, recognized me, and from then on took no notice of me. 'Who are you?' he asked Milenkovitch again.

'I am from the company of Gorditch, of Trstenik,' said Milenkovitch.

'Show me your passport,' said the *vojvoda.*

Milenkovitch gave it to him.

'This is out of date,' said the *vojvoda.*

'I know,' said Milenkovitch. 'If you will ring up *Vojvoda*

Gorditch, he will confirm that a new one is being prepared.'

'What else have you got in your pockets?' asked Mashan.

'Nothing,' said Milenkovitch. This was a mistake.

'Search them,' said Mashan to his sergeant.

The sergeant took away Milenkovitch's precious Luger, and then felt in his inside pocket. To my surprise he drew out a thick packet of documents, in an envelope. They were all Radevitch's dispatches. Inside was all the information which Radevitch had collected and passed on to Drazha Mihailovitch. I did not know exactly what they contained, but I knew that there was the outline of our organization in Toplitsa. My letters from Ivanovitch to the Partisans were in their usual place under my puttees.

The sergeant then started to search me.

'Only take his arms,' said the *vojvoda*. 'I don't want anything else from him.'

The sergeant took out of my trousers pocket a little .675 automatic which Ivanovitch had given me. I had never fired it.

Mashan opened Milenkovitch's dispatches and glanced at them. 'I shall want to read these,' he said in a more friendly manner, 'and I'm afraid I must detain you for the night at Joshanichke Banje. Please come with me to my car.'

At Joshanichke Banje we were given a room in which to sleep, and the sergeant who had originally detained us brought us something to eat. 'Don't worry about this,' he said. 'The *vojvoda* is in a bad temper. Something must have upset him. He will help you on in the morning.'

We were locked in the room, which had a large window insecurely fastened. We discussed whether we would risk seeing Mashan in the morning, or make an attempt to escape during the night.

'The point is,' said Milenkovitch, 'if we escape, it means going without our documents. Those dispatches are most important. I dare not lose them while there is a chance of getting them back. You never know what will happen with a madman like Mashan. It is more than likely that he will let us go, as the sergeant says.'

'Exactly what was in the letters Radevitch wrote?' I asked.

'Fortunately no names, except yours and mine, which are not important,' said Milenkovitch. 'He explained the nature of the organization and the stage which it had reached, rather than the details of it. I read the dispatch. It was in fact a very bad one. But I should not like to return and report that I had lost it.'

'All he has of mine,' I said, 'are my chetnik passports, and the German one I got from Gorditch. They both describe me as a Slovene.'

'That cannot do much harm,' said Milenkovitch.

We decided that we would get what sleep we could and await developments. The bed was narrow, but we both slept soundly.

We were awakened roughly in the morning, and became aware that the temper of the situation had altered. From the moment we left the room, we were covered by a guard with a rifle.

Outside in the road there was an omnibus loaded with Mashan's soldiers, and Mashan himself was waiting beside it. We were bundled in.

Mashan sat in furious silence, while we made the journey of about twenty or thirty miles to Rashka. When we arrived at the headquarters we were taken out, still covered, and sent up to Mashan's headquarters. One of Mashan's personal bodyguard was delegated to guard us.

Most of the morning we stayed in an anteroom to Mashan's office, where we were made to sit down on two wooden chairs. The guard sat on a bench opposite. He was a tall, good-looking man, wearing the badges of King Peter's Royal Guard.

'What does Mashan intend to do with us?' I asked.

'There is nothing to be worried about. He will let you go for certain,' replied the guard.

'Then why all this palaver?' said Milenkovitch.

'He says he wishes to show you who is the master.'

Milenkovitch looked at the man's badges. 'What unit of the Guard were *you* in?' he asked.

'I was not in the Guard. I am not a regular soldier.'

'Then why are you wearing the badges?' said Milenkovitch.

'Mashan has made me a corporal in the Royal Guard.'

I expected Milenkovitch to make a sarcastic remark, and was relieved when he kept silent.

Odd soldiers kept coming in and out of the room, and they stared curiously at us, though the sight of men arrested must have been familiar to them.

There was one man for whom I waited with some anxiety, and that was Dangitch. I wanted, through him, to get a message to Drazha Mihailovitch. We had not long to wait. No sooner had he heard of our predicament than he came post haste. At first, he merely passed through the room, and took a quick look at the guard. Presently he came back, and said to the guard: 'Captain Ristitch wishes you to speak with him. I will stay here while you go.'

As soon as the guard had gone, Dangitch said: 'What is the situation?'

We told him, as best we knew it.

'I am afraid this is dangerous,' he said. 'I believe Mashan will undoubtedly hand you over either to the Serbian police in Belgrade or to the Germans. You will not be the first.'

'That's all very well,' said Milenkovitch, 'but he has all my dispatches, and they contain things which might very well mean the end of us. Luckily, they won't hurt the organization very much, because the important people are on the run, anyway, and no names are mentioned that will hurt us. Can you take a message to Drazha Mihailovitch?'

Dangitch agreed. 'You've got about ten minutes, no more,' he said. 'Write what you want to write on this notebook, and I will send it off.'

Milenkovitch scribbled a short note, explaining what had happened, and going briefly over the more important parts of the dispatches. Dangitch took the note without looking at it, and put it in his wallet.

'Now,' he said, 'I should get rid at the first opportunity of anything which might be damaging to you. The less the

Germans find on you, the easier it will be to concoct a story.

'Meanwhile, as long as you are here, and not in prison, don't lose hope. I may be able to work something yet. But you will understand that I dare not risk being suspected.'

Shortly after that, the guard came back.

There was a pause, during which we sat and smoked cigarettes. Then Mashan came in, carrying a pair of handcuffs. 'Handcuff these two men together,' he said, 'and take them to the jail.'

The guard sprang to it, while Mashan stood by. I had the idea of starting something, but I knew that any noise would attract men from all directions, and I did not want to risk a beating up at Mashan's hands.

Handcuffed together, Milenkovitch and I marched through the streets of Rashka, a guard on either side. The feeling was one of shame. We wanted to hide the handcuffs, and so we strolled along as nonchalantly as we could, walking out of step, so that the swing of our arms was not awkward. Few people took much notice of us. The strange thing about Rashka was that it was almost always totally deserted. The people seemed oppressed by the efficiency and numbers of Mashan's soldiers. And, for so small a town, it had quite a large German garrison. There were as many Germans on the streets as Serbs.

We entered the local jail through a high wooden door, and were faced with a small brick courtyard, at the far side of which was a low, white building, with small, barred windows. There was only one door, which stood always open, and, just inside, sat one of Mashan's men.

They took us in, and wrote down our names, as we gave them. They noted against mine that I was English, although I said that I was a Slovene.

A windowless corridor led to the cells. They were large, and evidently designed each for more than one prisoner. The one into which we were put was empty. The window was high up, and underneath it was a raised board, which presumably served as a bed. Four or five men could have lain on it side by side. The walls were whitewashed and the door was of heavy wood, bolted on the outside. There was a small hole cut in it so that the guard could look in.

We had not been there many minutes before the door was opened and four Germans entered. One of them, speaking English, said: 'Which of you is the Englishman?'

Milenkovitch and I both looked blank.

'We know,' said the German, 'that one of you is English, and we wish to know which one.'

We still kept silent.

'You are the Englishman,' said the German, pointing at me.

'I am sorry, but I do not understand,' I replied in Serb.

Another of the Germans, speaking Serb, then began to question Milenkovitch. He asked him who he was and where he came from, and Milenkovitch told him our old story about being chetniks of Gorditch's.

The Serb-speaking German then turned to me and said: 'Are you a Serb?'

'No,' I said. 'I am a Slovene.'

'It is no use trying to deceive us, you know,' said the English speaker. 'We know that you are English.'

'I am sorry,' I said again in Serb, 'but I do not understand.'

The Germans then had a conversation between themselves, the gist of which I could not follow. Then, suddenly, the English-speaking one turned on me and said: 'Where are your glasses?'

I was not wearing them, they were in my pocket. He almost caught me out, for it was with the greatest difficulty that I restrained myself from telling or showing him. Something in my face may have given me away, for the German smiled. The four of them held a short conversation, and went away.

But we noticed that they had left a German sentry on the door.

Presently, the guard who had been on the door when we arrived brought us in a meal. To our surprise, it contained a bowl of goulash and pieces of fried chicken.

'To whom do we owe this?' asked Milenkovitch.

'When I went home for my midday meal,' replied the chetnik, 'I told my wife that we had an Englishman in the prison. She insisted on cooking a meal for him. She likes the English.'

I thanked him. There did not seem to be much else to do about it.

During the afternoon I made a great effort to pull myself together. The events of the past two days seemed to have atrophied my brain. But I found it very difficult to continue to think constructively.

The first thing to do, obviously, now that the Germans knew who I was, was to get rid of the documents I still had. I asked to go to the lavatory, and, while I was there, I tore them up and stuffed them down it.

The next thing was to look for ways of escaping. I had no idea of what either Mashan's or the Germans' intentions were. There was no obvious way out of the prison in which we found ourselves. One could only be prepared for any chance that might offer.

None was offered. That evening, shortly before dark, a large bus backed into the prison yard. In it were about twenty-five of Mashan's soldiers. Shortly afterwards five Germans, armed with tommy-guns, also marched into the yard and fell out by the bus, lolling against it and smoking cigarettes.

We were called from our cells and handcuffed. Then we were ordered into the bus. We were placed together on a single seat in the middle, while the Germans sat down in the nearest seats on either side. Finally, Mashan Djurovitch himself arrived. Still without speaking, he tested the handcuffs and gave some orders, which I did not hear, to the guard.

Then we set out northwards. We travelled all night, through Kraljevo, Gruzha, and Kragujevats, and on into flatter, richer country, which was strange to me. Several times we stopped, and on each occasion Mashan's men brought us coffee, *rakija*, or cigarettes.

Milenkovitch and I spent the time formulating a version of the story which we were to tell when we were interrogated. We decided that neither of us would admit to having known the other for more than a very short time.

The fact that Milenkovitch's dispatches had been discovered made complete denial of our complicity with Mihailovitch impossible. My passports would also take some explaining away. We would say that I was an escaped prisoner of war, that I had come across Milenkovitch in Toplitsa and, learning that he was to set out for Mihailovitch's headquarters, asked if I could go with him. Milenkovitch himself would say that he had been with Gorditch until recently, when he had made contact with Drazha's organization in Toplitsa, because he thought that Drazha was more active against the communists than Kosta's chetniks were.

In order to explain the dispatches from Keserovitch, we would say that we had met a courier from Keserovitch's headquarters at a prearranged place, and he had given us them. My role was to maintain ignorance. Milenkovitch would have a freer hand, but would maintain that he knew little or nothing about me.

Belgrade is a beautiful city, but approaching it from the south you see very little of it. The road is wide and tarred, and the villages look more prosperous than those in the south. My first impression of the city was that, in the year since it had been dive-bombed by the Germans, it had been made to look extremely tidy. The buildings were high and white, and the streets through which we passed, wide. There were smart shops, though I did not get a chance to see what sort of things they were selling. The majority of the inhabitants looked rather shabbier than I had expected. Nevertheless, as I realized that we were in the middle of the first city of the Balkans, I suddenly felt my own shabbiness and dirt acutely.

I was wearing the green uniform which I had had made in Alexandrovats, but my boots were dirty and cracked, so

that in one place my toe showed through. My shirt was open, for I had no tie, and badly needed washing and mending. My hair was long and unkempt, and my hands dirty. I had not shaved for three or four days.

The omnibus pulled up outside a building which Milenkovitch told me had been, in peacetime, the headquarters of the Serbian police. As we were led inside, Milenkovitch said: 'Good luck, and stick to your story.'

Presently a green-uniformed Serbian policeman came and took off my handcuffs. He had a rifle. 'Come this way,' he said.

He led me outside and took me up several flights of stairs. 'Who are you?' he asked.

'I am an Englishman,' I replied.

'How did you get here?'

'I am an escaped prisoner of war.'

'Who captured you?'

'Mashan Djurovitch,' I said.

'The chetnik *vojvoda*?'

'Yes.'

'Shame on him—shame on him,' said the Serb, with what seemed to be genuine feeling. Then he added: 'Don't be afraid.'

That was too much. I felt near to weeping. Between my teeth I managed to say: 'I am not afraid. I only hate you and all Serbs.'

The policeman took me to a cell and opened the door. 'You will not be long in there,' he said.

The cell appeared to be on the top floor of the building. It was large and bare, and very crowded. All round the walls men were lying in various states of undress. They looked up as I came in, but their apathy was plain on their faces. They were mostly unshaven, and were of every age, and apparently from every walk of life.

'Who are you?' asked one of them, listlessly.

'An Englishman,' I replied.

They were not interested. A small man near the door made room for me. 'Sit down here,' he said.

There were fourteen of them in that cell, and, lying round the walls, they left a small space in the middle. There was not much room for a man to lie down. They were talking desultorily among themselves.

On one side of me was a young man who looked a physical wreck. He was dressed in a shabby grey suit, through which his shoulder-blades showed. His face was bruised, and one of his hands shook continuously as though it were paralysed.

On the other side was the small man who had made room for me. He was stocky, with blue eyes and black hair, and a determined look about his mouth.

Opposite, a man in a check shirt and grey peasant's breeches asked me if I had any cigarettes.

'No,' I replied.

I rested my head uncomfortably against the wall and tried not to think.

The boy on my right, with the shaking hand, was the first to speak to me. 'They are brutes,' he said. 'They say I know where there is a store of arms which the Partisans have left here in Belgrade. Every Sunday they take me away and interrogate me. They beat me. I would tell them if I knew, but I don't, so how can I? But they will not believe me. Every Sunday they beat me more. I don't think I can stand it.'

I could not reply, for there seemed to be nothing to say.

Suddenly there was a scratching on the door. The man in the check shirt leaped up and whispered something through it. Someone outside pushed a little spill of paper underneath which the man in the check shirt seized greedily. The spill contained about enough tobacco for one cigarette. The man in the check shirt went back to his place holding the precious stuff in his hand. He took a piece of paper from his pocket, and rolled a cigarette. Then somebody else produced a match and a piece of matchbox. The man in the check shirt lit the cigarette, drew deeply at it, inhaled the smoke, and let it trickle down his nose. Then he passed it to the man next to him. Each man took a puff and passed it to his next-door neighbour. When it came to me, I said: 'No, thank you, I don't smoke.'

The little man on my left started to ask me questions about myself, which I answered very cautiously. Seeing that I was unwilling to be drawn, he said:

'Listen. I am a friend. I am a Polish officer, and have been in prisons for more than a year now, because three times I have escaped from Poland. This is the farthest I have ever got.

'Listen carefully. They will question you. I do not think the Serbs will beat you—they only beat their own people. But the Germans might, and the Serbs will probably hand you over. Understand?'

'I understand,' I said, 'but I have gathered that already.'

'Listen,' said the Pole. 'When the Germans start questioning you, tell them a story. Make it as long and circumstantial as you can. If there are addresses and names you can give without betraying anybody, give them. If you try to say nothing, they will beat you until you talk. If you say something and then alter it, they will beat you even more. The thing to do is to make up a story and stick to it. Then they may beat you for a little while, and they may even try worse things, especially if they think you know something that they want to find out. But they will stop in the end. Only stick to your story. Never change it. Never.'

'Thank you,' I said.

In the months to come I was indeed thankful for this advice.

After about an hour, another policeman came and took me out of the cell. He led me down the several flights of stairs again, and I noticed this time that the walls were green, the stairs were of stone, and there was a lift shaft, with a wire-netting cage, running down the middle. We came to an office, and there a slick-looking young man, in civilian clothes, sat behind a desk.

'Please sit down,' he said. 'You are English? What is your real name?'

I told him. He took a few more particulars of that sort and then started to go through the things which they had taken from my pockets. Beside him sat a secretary, a smart-looking, rather overblown blonde. As he called out the list of things, she wrote it down on a typewriter. The young man, when he had glanced at the contents of my wallet, asked me if these were all. I said they were, for I was not to know whether Mashan had handed over my various passports.

Then, from the papers in my wallet, the slick young man produced a small slip which I had overlooked. I was horrified to remember that it was a letter that Ivanovitch had given me for one of his friends who had escaped to London. 'If', he had said, 'you get a chance of sending this over Mihailovitch's radio, send it.'

'Now,' said the slick young police officer, 'just to show you that you have nothing to fear from us, I will show you what I will do with this. You wouldn't like the Germans to find it, would you?'

I did not answer.

'Look,' he said, and tore the paper into small pieces, which he screwed up in his hand, and threw into the waste-paper basket.

'Now, you see?' he said pleasantly, 'there is nothing to be afraid of.'

'I am not afraid of you,' I said as evenly as I could, 'nor of the Germans either.'

'That is a good thing,' said the young man, 'for you are about to meet some. Come with me.' As he rose, he felt in his pocket and showed me an automatic. 'Don't try anything silly,' he said.

'Aha,' I thought, 'who is afraid of whom, now?'

We went along a corridor, and, as I went, I had that slightly sick feeling you get when you are first in to bat, only worse.

He opened the door of a small room, and, as I entered, I saw that inside were four German officers. I stood to attention for a second, and then relaxed.

The German officers were all armed, two with revolvers, and two with tommy-guns.

One of them rose and saluted. 'Sprechen Sie deutsch?' he asked.

'Nein,' I said, 'ich nicht spreche deutsch.'

'Ich spreche kein deutsch,' he corrected gently.

Presently they led in Milenkovitch too. As he entered he saluted, and was saluted in his turn. He took no notice of me.

Then one of the Germans took me by the sleeve, and wound his finger in my cuff in such a way that I could not jerk free. 'Kommen Sie,' he said.

For a moment I came face to face with Milenkovitch. He gave a grin and an enormous wink. 'The lousy bastards,' he whispered. Only he used a much stronger word.

'Do not talk,' said one of the German officers, almost primly.

They rushed us downstairs at an enormous pace, with me first. There were four German staff cars waiting outside the door.

The first one drew away as we appeared. My officer bundled me into the second, the engine of which was already running. We drew away on the heels of the first. At a terrific pace we drove through a number of streets. I have never driven so fast in a town. Then we pulled up in front of an enormous building that looked rather like a luxury hotel.

We were rushed out of the cars at the same pace, through a magnificent foyer, in which a number of women, who seemed to me incredibly beautiful, were sitting in easy-chairs; down some steel-shod stairs, and came to a steel door. I noticed that Milenkovitch was a few seconds behind, also being led by the cuff.

My officer pressed a bell beside the door. Immediately it swung open, and there stood a young man in uniform of musical-comedy smartness, with jack-boots, a tie, and a revolver. He clicked his heels, stood aside, and saluted. We rushed in. Along a stone corridor, lit with electric light. Into a small room.

There we stopped. They appeared to have been expecting us. Behind a desk sat an enormous man in black uniform. Beside him sat a man in S.S. uniform, with a typewriter. On the other side, a man with a tommy-gun.

Milenkovitch was made to stay outside.

The man in the black uniform asked me my name and various other particulars, in Serb. Then he said: 'Undress!'

I started to take off my jacket, and noticed that none of the officers who had brought us was there any longer.

'Hurry,' said the man in black, and the man with the tommy-gun snatched my jacket from me.

I took off my shirt and boots and socks as quickly as I could.

'Everything,' said the man in black.

I took off my trousers.

They went through every stitch of clothing, and felt the linings and seams. They took the laces from my boots, tore the cloth belt from my jacket.

'Now dress again,' said the man in black, and flung me my shirt.

Suddenly he looked up and loomed round the desk and stood over me. He snatched the shirt out of my hand.

'You are a Jew,' he said.

'I am not a Jew,' I replied, 'I am an Englishman.'

'Then why are you circumcised?' he asked. 'You are a Jew.'

'I am not,' I said.

'You filthy Jew,' he screamed, and aimed a kick at me.

I turned, and took the kick on my thigh. It hurt so much that I could hardly stand up straight.

'Why are you circumcised?' he shouted, and took hold of my hair, shaking my head.

'Many people are circumcised in England who are not Jews,' I replied as best I could. 'It is for the health.'

He let go of my hair and went back to the other side of the desk. 'Dress,' he said. 'We know how to treat half-Jews like you.'

I put on my shirt and trousers, and started to put the laces in my boots.

'Don't do that,' said the man with the tommy-gun.

The man in black loomed across again and slapped my face so unexpectedly that I bit my tongue, and my eyes started to water. 'I knew you were a Jew,' he said. 'Look at the coward. It's about time you learnt discipline. You are not allowed bootlaces.'

'Why?' I asked, foolishly.

'You will probably want to commit suicide before long, like all Jews,' said the man in black.

I put my boots on, and, holding my trousers up with my hands, I stood and waited for what was coming.

'Thirty-two,' said the man in black to the man with the tommy-gun. The latter opened another steel door, and led me down a long corridor. On either side of this corridor was a row of steel doors. It was very dark, until the man with the tommy-gun came to a light and switched it on.

At the end, he pulled back a bolt and opened a door.

He waved me in.

The cell was about six feet square and eight feet high. There was no window, and a continual roaring noise was made by the artificial ventilation.

The walls and the floor of the cell were of concrete, the door of steel, and all the cell contained was a plank bed, about two feet wide. At the foot of the bed was a hole and through it came a chain.

'Sit on the bed,' said the man with the tommy-gun. He seized my foot, and, pulling a loop of the chain through the hole, passed it round my leg. Then he pulled it tight and fastened it with a padlock.

He went outside and shut the door.

Then the light went out. And I knew that I was in the hands of the Gestapo.

# A LIST OF THE PEOPLE IN THIS BOOK

It will be noticed that there is no mention in this list of Marshal Tito. This is because during the year 1941–2 I never heard his name. He was produced by the Partisans as their leader at a later stage of the war.

ALABASTER, DENIS—A young British sapper officer, captured in Crete, who escaped in the Balkans, and was for a time under the protection of Kosta Pechanats.

ATSA—A forester in Government service, and one of my first Jugoslav friends.

BOGINJA—A young woman who served with the Partisans.

BOON, DENIS—A captain of the Australian Expeditionary Force, whom I met in Brus with Peter Maynard.

BOZHA—Not a very brave chetnik; he served first with Kosta Pechanats, then with Keserovitch, and finally with Radevitch.

BUKVITCH—*Vojvoda* at Prokuplje.

CHIRAKOVITCH, RADE—One of Keserovitch's men, in my platoon.

DANGITCH—One of Mihailovitch's officers, sent by him to serve as a spy with the forces of Mashan Djurovitch.

DANIELE—A Jewess, originally with the Partisans, who eventually became my machine-gunner.

DAVIDOVITCH, DAVID, DUSHAN, ELI, and JACOB—Friendly peasants.

DJONOVITCH—Commandant of the (quisling) Fifth Armed Company, at Kurshumlje.

DJURITCH—Drazha Mihailovitch's commander at the battle of Kraljevo.

DJUROVITCH, MASHAN—He was originally one of the *vojvode* (leaders) of Kosta Pechanats, later changed his allegiance to the quisling Prime Minister, Milan Neditch, and eventually became so powerful that he operated independently under the Germans. (Assassinated in 1943 by his own men.)

DUSHAN THE ALBANIAN—The notorious adjutant of Pechanats's *vojvode*, Mika the Priest; later *vojvoda* at Blatse in succession to him.

GORDITCH, BOGDAN—Kosta Pechanats's *vojvoda* at Trstenik.

IVANOVITCH, RASHA—A Belgrade journalist, who joined Mihailovitch's staff on the Ravna Gora in the summer of 1941, and later became the brain behind Radevitch's organization in Toplitsa.

JAKTCHITCH—Partisan leader at the battle of Kraljevo.

JONES, RON—Australian officer, who escaped with me from the train.

JOSHITCH—A young corporal of the regular infantry, who was in the service first of Kosta Pechanats, then of General Novakovitch, and later of Major Keserovitch.

KESEROVITCH, DRAGOLJUB—A guerrilla leader, originally under the command of Kosta Pechanats. After Pechanats's defection from the Serbian cause, he operated for a short while independently, then with Novakovitch, and, finally, under the command of Drazha Mihailovitch. (Executed in 1945 by the present Jugoslav Government.)

LALATOVITCH—A major of the Jugoslav General Staff, who arrived with the mission headed by Captain X.

LASTITCH, DRAGOMIR—Originally a Partisan, but joined the staff of Radevitch in Toplitsa.

LJOTITCH—A pre-war Jugoslav fascist leader, who formed a small band of followers in 1941.

MILKOVITCH, LIKA—A friend who lived in Alexandrovats.

MOSKOVLJEVITCH—A peasant who lived near Brus.

MARIJANITCH—One of Kosta Pechanats's *vojvode* at Kurshumlje. He was a dangerous man, who once caused seventy communists to be hanged in a row along the roadside.

MAYNARD, PETER—A British sapper officer, who escaped from the prisoner-of-war train with Denis Alabaster, and later lived for a while in Brus with Denis Boon.

MIHAILOVITCH, DRAZHA—The famous Serbian guerrilla leader. (Executed in 1946 by the present Jugoslav Government.)

MIKA THE PRIEST—Kosta Pechanats's notorious *vojvoda* at Blatse.

MILAN, CHIKA—A friendly peasant.

MILENKOVITCH, DIMITRIJE—A lieutenant in the Jugoslav artillery, who joined Drazha Mihailovitch in the summer of 1941, took a leading part in the battle of Valjevo, and later was Radevitch's chief of staff in Toplitsa.

MOISILOVITCH—A regular sergeant of the Jugoslav cavalry, in the forces of Kosta Pechanats and later of General Novakovitch.

NEDITCH, GENERAL MILAN—Quisling prime minister of Jugoslavia during the occupation.

NIKCHITCH—A regular sergeant of the Jugoslav Army, who was in the service first of Kosta Pechanats, and later of General Novakovitch.

NOVAKOVITCH, GENERAL—A guerrilla leader originally under the command of Kosta Pechanats. After the latter's pact with the Germans, Novakovitch aspired to the command of all guerrilla forces operating against the Germans, but was not recognized either by Mihailovitch or by the Partisans.

OSTOJITCH—A major of the Jugoslav General Staff, who arrived at Mihailovitch's headquarters with the mission headed by Captain 'X.' (Killed by Tito's forces, 1945.)

PECHANATS, KOSTA—At the time of the invasion of Jugoslavia, Pechanats was the official leader of the Chetnik organization, but, during the summer of 1941, he made a pact with the Germans, and thereafter served under their protection. His men often fought against both Mihailovitch and the Partisans.

PECHANATS, MILAN—Son of Kosta Pechanats, and one of his *vojvode* at Kurshumlje.

POPOVITCH—One of Keserovitch's officers.

RADENKOVITCH, STANIMIR—Radevitch's adjutant both at the battle of Kraljevo and, later, in Toplitsa.

RADEVITCH, MISHA—Lieutenant-Colonel in the regular Jugoslav Army. He was originally under the command of Kosta Pechanats, but after the latter's pact with the Germans became one of his most violent enemies. In the winter of 1941–2, he placed himself under the command of Drazha Mihailovitch, and was sent by him to form a military and political organization in the province of Toplitsa.

RADIUJE—A pilot of the Jugoslav Air Force, and one of the officers of Major Keserovitch.

RASHA—One of Radevitch's agents in Prokuplje and friend of Mihailovitch.

SIMA—A young Partisan, later in my platoon, who after the battle of Kraljevo joined, with me, the forces of Major Keserovitch.

SMILIJANITCH—An officer of Drazha Mihailovitch.

STORK, THE—Kosta Pechanats's *vojvoda* at Alexandrovats.

SVETITCH—Captain in the Jugoslav Army. One of Mihailovitch's better officers.

TCHARAPITCH, VITKA—A wealthy peasant, who worked with Radevitch in Toplitsa.

VASITCH, DRAGOMIR—A rascally officer of Drazha Mihailovitch.

VLAKOVITCH—One of Keserovitch's officers, who befriended me.

VUKOVITCH—A peasant *vojvoda* originally under the command of Kosta Pechanats, but who subsequently changed his allegiance to Radevitch and Drazha Mihailovitch.

ZAKITCH—Partisan leader on the Jastrevats and at the battle of Krushevats. (Killed in 1941.)

ZHIVANOVITCH, ZHIVAN—A friendly peasant.

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Bare
Kragujevats
Knitch
TCH)
Gruzha
Gleditchske Pl
berevats
Gruzha
Vitanovats
Vrba
Kamenitsa
Vrnjachke Banje
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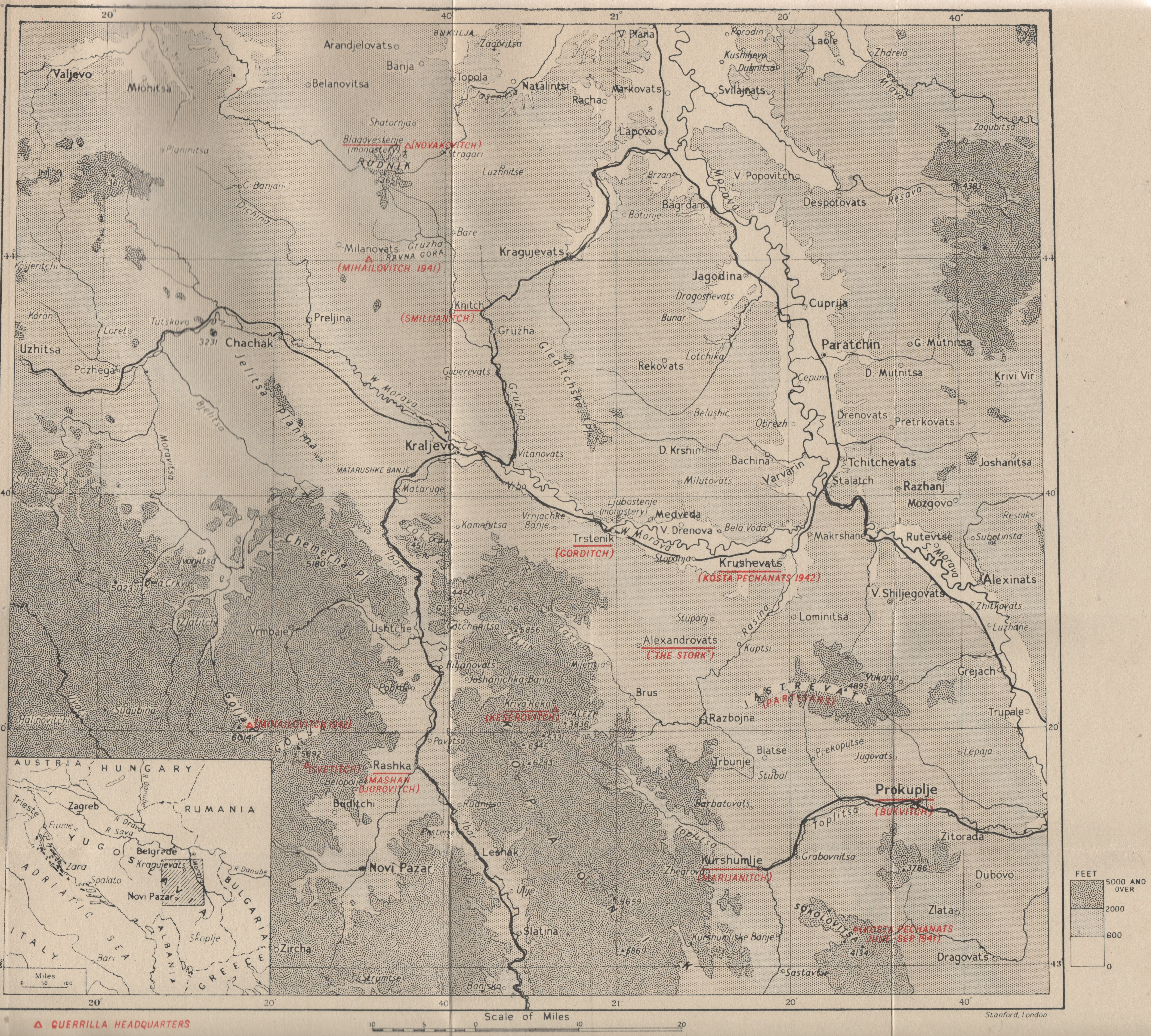
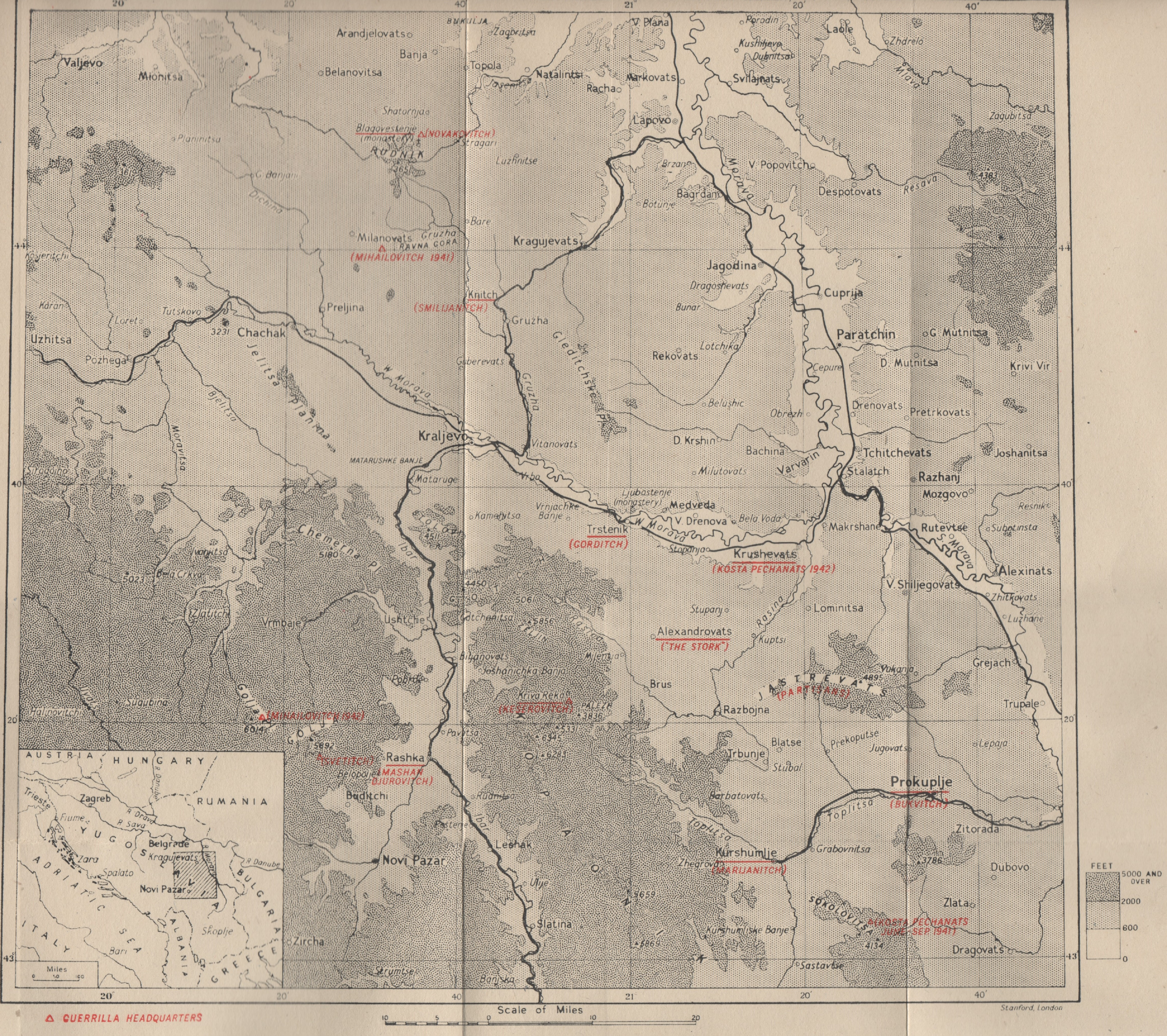

Valjevo
Mionitsa
Arandjelovats
Banja
Belanovitsa
Topola
Bukulja
Zagorits
Natalintsi
Markovats
V. Plana
Porodin
Laole
Zhdrelo
Kushiljevo
Dubnitsa
Svilajnats
Racha
Lapovo
Mlava
Shatornja
Blagovestenje (monastery)
(NOVAKOVITCH)
Stragari
RUDNIK
Planinitsa
Luznitse
G. Banjani
Dichina
Brzan
Morava
V. Popovitch
Despotovats
Resava
Zagubitsa
Bagrdan
Botunje
Bare
Milanovats
Gruzha
RAVNA GORA
(MIHAILOVITCH 1941)
Kragujevats
Jagodina
Dragoshevats
Cuprija
Kosjeritchi
Kdran
Preljina
Knitch
(SMILIJANITCH)
Bunar
Tutskovo
Loret
Chachak
Uzhitsa
Pozhega
Gruzha
Paratchin
G. Mutnitsa
Rekovats
Lotchika
Cepure
D. Mutnitsa
Krivi Vir
Jelitsa Planina
Gledittchske Pl.
Guberevats
W. Morava
Bjelitsa
Moravitsa
Belushic
Obrezh
Drenovats
Pretrkovats
Kraljevo
Vitanovats
D. Krshin
Bachina
Tchitchevats
Joshanitsa
MATARUSHKE BANJE
Mataruge
Vrba
Milutovats
Varvarin
Stalatch
Razhanj
Mozgovo
Stragolino
Ljubostenje (monastery)
Medveda
Resnik
Kamenitsa
Vrnjachke Banje
V. Drenova
Bela Voda
Chemerna Pl.
Stolovi
Trstenik
(GORDITCH)
W. Morava
Makrshane
Rutevtse
Subotinsta
S. Morava
Ivanjitsa
Bela Crkva
Ibar
Stopanja
Krushevats
(KOSTA PECHANATS 1942)
Alexinats
Zhitkovats
Zlatitch
Vrmbaje
Ushtche
Gotchenitsa
Rasina
V. Shiljegovats
Lominitsa
Stupanj
Alexandrovats
("THE STORK")
Kuptsi
Luzhane
ZELJIN
Biljanovats
Joshanichka Banja
Miljenja
Pobrdje
Brus
Vukanja
JASTREVATS
(PARTISANS)
Grejach
Ibar
Sugubina
Halinovitchi
Golija
(MIHAILOVITCH 1942)
Kriva Reka
(KESEROVITCH)
PALEZH
Razbojna
Trupale
GOLIJA
Pavlitsa
(SVETITCH)
KOPAONIK
Rashka
(MASHAN DJUROVITCH)
Belopolje
Trbunje
Blatse
Stubal
Prekoputse
Jugovats
Lepaja
Buditchi
Rudnitsa
Barbatovats
Prokuplje
(BUKVITCH)
Toplitsa
Toplitsa
Zitorada
Postenje
Leshak
Novi Pazar
Kurshumlije
Zhegrova
(MARIJANITCH)
Grabovnitsa
Dubovo
Ulje
Slatina
Kurshumlijske Banje
SOKOLOVITSA
(KOSTA PECHANATS JUNE–SEP. 1941)
Zlata
Zircha
Dragovats
Sastavtse
Strumtse
Banjska
20°
20'
40'
21°
20'
40'
44°
40'
20'
43°
3231
3619
3651
4383
4511
4450
5180
5023
5061
5856
4895
6041
5892
3836
5331
6345
6243
3786
5659
5869
4134
AUSTRIA
HUNGARY
RUMANIA
Trieste
Zagreb
R. Drava
R. Sava
R. Danube
Fiume
YUGOSLAVIA
Belgrade
Zara
Kragujevats
Spalato
Novi Pazar
Morava
BULGARIA
ADRIATIC SEA
ITALY
Bari
ALBANIA
Skoplje
GREECE
Miles
0 50 100
FEET
5000 AND OVER
2000
600
0
Scale of Miles
10 5 0 10 20
Stanford, London
△ GUERRILLA HEADQUARTERS


20°
20'
40'
21°
20'
40'
44°
40'
20'
43°
Valjevo
Mionitsa
Arandjelovats
Banja
Belanovitsa
Bukulja
Zagoritsa
Topola
Natalintsi
V. Plana
Porodin
Kushiljevo
Dubnitsa
Laole
Zhdrelo
Mlava
Markovats
Racha
Svilajnats
Lapovo
Shatornja
Blagovestenje (monastery)
△ NOVAKOVITCH
Stragari
RUDNIK
3651
Planinitsa
G. Banjani
Drchina
Luzhnitse
Brzan
V. Popovitch
Morava
Bagrdan
Despotovats
Resava
Zagubitsa
4383
Botunje
Bare
Gruzha
Milanovats
△ RAVNA GORA
(MIHAILOVITCH 1941)
Kragujevats
Kosjeritchi
Jagodina
Dragoshevats
Cuprija
Knitch
(SMILJANITCH)
Kdran
Loret
Tutskovo
Preljina
Bunar
Uzhitsa
3231
Chachak
Gruzha
Paratchin
G. Mutnitsa
Pozhega
Jelitsa Planina
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Tchitchevats
Joshanitsa
Matarushke Banje
Varvarin
Stalatch
Razhanj
Stragono
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Rasina
Rasina
Kopaonik
Mljenica
Alexandrovats
("THE STORK")
Kuptsi
Bilanovats
Joshanichka Banja
Vukanja
4895
Grejach
Pobrde
Brus
JASTREVATS
(PARTISANS)
Ibar
Sugubina
Kriva Reka
△ PALEZH
(KESEROVITCH)
3836
Razbojna
Trupale
Halinovitchi
Golija
△ MIHAILOVITCH 1942
6041
Pavitsa
5331
6345
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Blatse
Lepaja
(SVETITCH)
(MASHAN DJUROVITCH)
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Prekoputse
Jugovats
Belopolje
Stubal
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Prokuplje
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Rudnitsa
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Toplitsa
Toplitsa
Postene
Leshak
Zitorada
Kurshumlje
Grabovnitsa
Novi Pazar
Zhegrova
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3786
Dubovo
Uljje
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SOKOLOVITSA
(KOSTA PECHANATS JUNE–SEP. 1941)
Slatina
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4134
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Banjska
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AUSTRIA
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RUMANIA
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Fiume
R. Drava
R. Sava
YUGOSLAVIA
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Kragujevats
Morava
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BULGARIA
ADRIATIC SEA
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5000 AND OVER
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Scale of Miles
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0
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20
Stanford, London
△ GUERRILLA HEADQUARTERS

Gordon Kirk
English Miles
Scale
10 0 10 20 30 50
Railways
Route
Boundaries
E
N
S
W
TURKEY
Fastánea
R.Maritsa
Dhidhimótikhon
Souflión
Alexandróupolis
Plovdiv
Komótini
BULGRIA
Xánthia
Sofia
Kaválla
Peramos
R.Morava
Nish
Leskovats
Sokolovitsa
Gruzha
R.Gruzha
Kraljevo
JUGOSLAVIA
Kerdhillion
Lake Lantzas
GREECE
Rashka
Mitrovitsa
Skoplje
Polikastron
Salonika
R.Vardar